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**BREAKDOWN OF HEGEMONY IN THAILAND:
THAILAND'S POLITICAL CRISIS 2006- IN GRAMSCIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

The central theme of this thesis is the proposal that in Thai politics, a new historical transformational phase, a new paradigm, has emerged since the 1997-98 Southeast Asian economic crises. It is proposed, that this new phase indicates the breakdown of the hegemonic rule of the old elite networks – the army, the bureaucracy, the palace, and the old Thai business elites. These networks, it is argued, have held both material and ideological control over the masses since Thailand became a modern capitalist state in the late 19th century during the historic hegemonic bloc of the Pax Britannica. The starting point for analysis in this study is to interpret Thailand's current political crisis, which has been undergoing since the military ousted the Prime Minister elect, Taksin Shinawat, and his Thai Rak Thai government in September 2006, as a class conflict, the roots of which are embedded in the historical development processes of capitalism in Thailand. The new transformational phase, it is argued, indicates the emergence of the rural and the urban poor as a counter-hegemonic politically active social force in the realm of Thai politics. The rural and the urban poor as a politically active force demand more participation in the political decision-making, more social justice, and more social reforms.

To illustrate the new transformational phase in Thai politics, the author has combined two approaches as interpretative tools in illustrating the function of hegemony in the Thai context against the backdrop of the function of hegemony on the international systemic level. The two approaches are the Gramscian method of the philosophy of praxis, which the author has reconstructed from Gramsci's original texts, and the Neo-Gramscian Italian School's theory of the historic hegemonic blocs in the world system. In Gramscian analysis, the two levels – the domestic and the international – are intertwined. To articulate Thailand's current political crisis as a major shift in the class relations in Thai society, Gramsci's concepts of organic crisis and his dual notion of the war of position/passive revolution are used. Thailand's current political crisis is interpreted as a Gramscian organic crisis, a crisis of the state authority, which indicates a major historical rupture point from the passive revolution situation to a war of position situation between the various configurations of social forces. In the passive revolution situation, the hegemonic rulers keep the cohesion of their hegemonic social order by implementing social reforms brought about by the inbuilt change processes in the system. In the war of position situation, on the contrary, the organized counter-hegemonic forces, due to their empowered political consciousness, challenge the old hegemonic order and demand an alternative way of organizing a society.

The focus of the analysis is on the historical forms of change and transformation of the totality of the power relations in Thai society in Thai historical context, where the hegemony of the elite networks emerges from the intertwined processes on the levels of the material base structure and the superstructure: the economic, the political, and the ideological. Hence, the function of hegemony in Thai context is illustrated through historical analysis: the hegemonic structures are positioned as having initially been created against the international systemic

changes of the Pax Britannica era, when the interests of the elite networks were unified under the strong nation-state, upheld by the military and the bureaucracy. The consolidation of the hegemonic rule and the strengthening of the military, as well as reinstating Thai monarchy as a hegemonic tool, happened during the American neo-liberalist project of the Pax Americana era. The Southeast Asian economic crisis of 1997-98 and the ensued international neo-liberalist offensive, it is argued, set in motion the breakdown of the hegemonic elite networks rule. In the Gramscian perspective, the polarization of society and the counterhegemonic resistance movement, embodied in the Red Shirt Movement, indicate a major change in the power configurations of the Thai society.

Creating Hegemony

Consolidating Hegemony

Breakdown of hegemony

International
level

Pax Britannica (1855-1914)

Expansion of capitalism

Pax Americana (1945-1971)

Neo-liberalism

Oligopolistic

Neo-liberalism (1980s-)

Domestic
Level

Changes Superstructure

- Creation of a unified Nation State
- Military
- Bureaucracy

Changes superstructure

- Reinstating Monarchy
- Strengthening of the Military

What is unknown

?

What is known

A new transformational phase in Thai politics: the emergence of the rural and the urban poor as a counter-hegemonic active political force who are challenging the old elite networks' hegemonic rule with their demands on social reform, social justice and participation in political decision-making.

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHY I AM DOING RESEARCH IN THAI POLITICS

I have a long-time interest in Thai politics and its twists and turns, reaching back to the year 1992 when I visited Thailand as a tourist for the first time, right after a few months after the streets of Bangkok had been stained with blood once again, in yet another military crackdown of people demanding political and social reforms. I moved to the country three years later, and lived and worked there for years. In the process, I became familiar with the Thai language. This process of crossing the language barrier not only had a profound impact on my own understanding of Thai society, Thai politics, and Thailand's cultural practices, but it also opened a new perspective for me, as to what was happening behind the carefully polished international image of Thailand.

Subsequently, the current historical political crisis that has engulfed Thailand since the 2006 military coup – Thailand's crisis of democracy - was a natural choice for my Master's thesis project. As this thesis is a product of twenty years' study on Thai politics, it naturally builds heavily on my own accumulated knowledge on the topic. With the help of this accumulated knowledge, the main goal of this project is to contribute to the knowledge on Thai politics, especially in Finland, by producing an alternative story to academic research on Thai politics, with the class perspective at the centre of analysis.

Thailand's current political crisis has lasted for eight years now, since the year 2006 when the Thai army deposed the democratically elected Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra¹. At the time of writing this, there is no end in sight to the crisis.

The bulk of the academic research on Thailand, "the hegemonic narrative" is often a monolithic, vertical "top-down" interpretation of the Thai elites' internal struggle for power, as the driving factor of Thai politics. The hegemonic narrative of the mainstream academic

¹ I find the official transliteration of Thai language misleading and confusing, as this system does not always correspond to the way the Thai language is pronounced. Therefore, I have taken the liberty of transliterating the Thai language words as they are pronounced. To give a couple of examples of the official transliteration system here vs. how they are pronounced in Thai: King Bhumibol in Thai is pronounced King Pumipon; Thaksin Shinawatra is Taksin Shinawat; Beer Singha is beer Sing; River Kwai is pronounced River Kwee, just to give a few examples. Heli Kontio.

research on Thai politics tends to portray the political developments in Thailand as a linear continuum of military rule, with civilian governments strewn in between. To me, this hegemonic narrative emphasizes the elite stakeholders' role in Thai politics, and to an extent, ignores the class conflict aspect of Thailand's political crisis, as well as the grassroots' perspective; or the perspective of the heterogenic, non-unified "masses," the people, as active agents of social change in the realm of Thai politics.

To understand the dynamics of the current historical Thai political crisis, I find it essential to focus on the totality of the power relations in Thai society in order to get a whole picture of the dynamics of the current crisis. In this perspective, the focus is on identifying and articulating social change and transformation of Thai society through historical analysis of situations, keeping the class nature of the conflict at the centre of the analysis. In my opinion, it is only through a holistic perspective that one can find answers to the questions, like, for example: why the crisis has lasted so long, and where the social movement of the Red Shirts emerges from. As the crisis is not only Thailand's domestic crisis, the developments inside Thailand also have to be seen against the backdrop of the international system.

Due to my own life experiences and my life as a social activist, the alternative story that emerged to me upon my learning the local language in Thailand, was more interesting to me than the aforementioned hegemonic narrative. At the forefront of this alternative story, is the hierarchical class nature of Thai society, its subtle and at the same time clear class distinctions, and the power struggles simmering underneath the smooth surface, between the various political stakeholders. These power struggles are ready to erupt into violence at the slightest provocation. Violence is always brewing under the smooth surface of Thai society, ready to erupt, like happened in the Red Shirt demonstrations in Bangkok in 2010, and in the recent "the People's Democratic Reform Committee" street demonstrations in Bangkok that begun in November 2013.

As contrast to the hegemonic narrative, in the alternative story, the bottom-to-top story, as I call it, the central question that emerges, is the asymmetrical power relationship and the power struggle between the hegemonic rulers and the ruled, which are in subordinate position in Thai society. This alternative story is a story of the struggles of the "people" (prachachon) against the elites (ammart), and their hegemonic rule, the roots of which point to the historical economic development processes of the Thai society, and their socio-political implications. Essential to this alternative story are the normative questions concerning social inequality,

social struggle, resistance, and the demands for participation of the ruled in political decision-making.

Seen from this perspective, a continuous domestic social conflict emerges, which in the current Thai political crisis, denotes an open confrontation between the rulers and the ruled, the ammart and the prachachon. On one side of the conflict, there are the economic elites, the army, the king, and the bureaucracy, who have ruled Thailand since the transformation of Thailand into a modern capitalist economy at the end of the 19th century during the expansion of Western capitalism. Up until now, the different sections of the elites, the army, the bureaucracy, and the business elites have had the upper hand in Thai politics.

On the other side of the conflict, there are the “ruled,” it is the “masses,” who demand social justice and more participation in the political decision-making process². The masses consist of different sections of the urban and the rural poor and lower middle-classes³. The masses have challenged the hegemonic rule of the elites several times during the past decades; however, all the mass uprising efforts of organized resistance - in 2010, in 1992, in 1976 and in 1973 have ended in a military crackdown of the protests⁴. However, since the latest military coup in 2006, when the Thai Army ousted the Prime Minister Taksin Shinawat, the masses’ continuous challenging the ruling elites’ power has become an on-going feature of Thai politics, manifested in the emergence of the Red Shirt Movement after the year 2008.

To articulate and identify this alternative story of Thailand’s current political crisis, I have chosen to use Antonio Gramsci’s political theory of hegemony and Gramsci’s methodology of philosophy of praxis, as interpretative tools in my thesis. In Gramscian class perspective, the power relationships between social forces in any society are rooted in the economic material forces of production, from which various social classes emerge. This non-static class-based perspective in this study entails looking at the current Thai historic political crisis through paying attention to the historical developments of Thailand as a capitalist state, and the economic, political, and social implications of this developmental process, and how they relate to the current crisis. The focus of this type of analysis is not linear, nor is it vertical or

² As proposed by several scholars later on, see for instance Ferrara 2011. Ferrara calls Thailand a minimal democracy and does an excellent analysis on different stakeholders in Thai politics and the way the elite networks’ powers reach over official institutions of governance in Thailand. As for the notions “the rulers” and “the ruled”, see Gramsci 2007, 144. Gramsci, in conceptualizing the elements of politics, created the concepts of the “rulers” and the “ruled” as the first element of politics; however specifying that “there do exist rulers and ruled, *under the conditions of a class society*”.

³ Ungpakorn 2010, 9.

⁴ Krittian 2010.

non-static. Instead, it focuses on transitions and forms of change, through a historical interpretation of the transformation of power relations between the various actors. What is essential in understanding Gramsci's political theory of hegemony, is understanding a crisis (be it economic or political) as an infinite creative flux, an opportunity, through which the social forces imbued in their struggle against the hegemonic forces in society may create new forms of social and political practices and bring about a new organisation of society⁵.

Thus, by using the Gramscian political theory and his philosophy of praxis, I hope to assess how the hegemonic rule of the elite networks was established in the international systemic context, how the hegemonic rule was consolidated, and how the counterhegemonic resistance movement, embodied in the Red Shirt Movement, emerges as a collective social movement.

The central argument in my thesis is that the 1997-98 South East Asian economic crisis and the ensued Thai Rak Thai Party era of modernizing Thailand with new economic and socio-political reforms, opened up a whole new phase - a whole new paradigm, if you like - in Thai politics. During this new phase, the rise of the political consciousness of the rural and the urban poor, and their emergence as active, heterogeneous, political stakeholders in the forefront of Thai politics. The other side of the coin is the reaction of the old hegemonic elite networks in holding on to their own interests and their efforts to preserve the old social order, and their reluctance in accepting the rural and the urban poor as stakeholders in Thai politics. This has manifested itself during the current political crisis in the elite networks' harsh narrowing of the democratic space for counter-hegemonic social forces to operate in, be it then through the strengthening of the military's position, suppressing political dissent, politicizing courts, and so on⁶. The elite networks are by no means a monolithic group – the intra-elite fighting for power resulted to Taksin Shinawat, a business tycoon and a part of the elite networks, being ousted in the military coup in 2006 by his rival elite groups⁷. Neither are the “masses” – the various configurations of civil society – a monolithic group, but their emergence includes various transfigurations of civil society since the beginning of the current political crisis in 2006.

What the outcome of the current Thai political crisis will be is open at the time of writing this thesis. However, one thing is certain: the Thai elite networks that have held the economic, the

⁵ Malo 2013 , 111.

⁶ Ungpakorn 2014.

⁷ Kharabi 2010, 24-25.

political, and the ideological power over people for decades in Thailand can no longer ignore the transformative power of the ordinary Thai people in producing their own social change. There is no going back to the old hegemonic order and to the “Thai-style democracy”, where democracy and political participation are notions defined by the elite networks, and handed down to the people from above.

2. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this thesis is fourfold. Firstly, this thesis is a humble attempt to add to the virtually non-existent academic research on Thai politics in the field of international relations in Finland. The second objective is to honour the applicability and flexibility of the Gramscian method in the field of the International Relations discipline, as an interpretative tool to analyse social transformation and change. The third objective of this thesis derives directly from the recent resuscitation of the Marxist – and the Gramscian perspective in the field of International Relations, as a tool to study the new anti-neoliberalist transnational social movements; and from the validity of this perspective in offering alternative insights to the possibilities of articulating, identifying - and eventually, possibly transforming the power relations in society, through generative collective action. The fourth aim derives from all the three aforementioned points: I hope that my thesis will in its own humble way, contribute to the Marxist and Gramscian academic research on Thai politics, as the Marxist perspective, apart from a few exceptions, has largely been neglected among the international academics who do research on Thai politics, apart for a few exceptions.

Thailand is the Finns’ number one holiday destination in Thailand. Many Finns spend part of the year in their holiday residences in Thailand. Thousands of seasonal migrant labourers come to Finland every year from the North Eastern part of Thailand to pick wild forest berries. There is plenty of cultural exchange between the two countries, in the form of intercultural marriages, for instance. Finland contributes to the development of the Mekong River financially within the EU framework. There is Finnish academic research in diverse academic fields available on all these topics.

Despite all this, however, Finnish academic research that focuses on Thai politics in the academic field of International Relations is neigh to non-existent. Apart from Marja-Leena

Heikkilä-Horn's⁸ research on the relationship of the Thai state and the Santi Asoke Buddhism sect from the perspective of comparative religion, Finnish academic research on Thai politics and only exists in the form of articles in pamphlets and newspaper analyses⁹.

I hope that this thesis will in its own humble way, fill the existing knowledge gap in Finnish academic research. Moreover, if this thesis will arouse curiosity, questions, and willingness in Finland to know more about Thai politics, this thesis has filled its purpose. Let it also be mentioned here that my thesis offers one narrow insight to Thai politics only. The perspective I write from is just as fallible and subject to criticism as any other study on the topic. In fact, if the perspective of this thesis will inspire someone to do research on Thai politics from another scholarly perspective, my work has served its purpose.

Marxist research has recently undergone somewhat of a Renaissance in the field of social sciences. , Marxist research remain fragmented and in the margins in the field of International Relations. In the field of International Relations, Marxism's applicability as an interpretative and a methodological tool has been used in, for instance, the subfields of the International Relations, like in globalization studies and in the field of political geography. Marxist research in the field of International Political Economy has also been resuscitated, especially in the context of analysing new anti-globalization social movements, and in the context of studying transnational flows of capital. The Amsterdam school of global political economy draws heavily on Gramsci's theory of hegemony; their contribution to the theory of International Relations concerns the formation of the transnational classes in the international system, thus focusing on the functional dimension of hegemony¹⁰. The Amsterdam School's approach focuses on seeing hegemony primarily in the functional sense, as the legitimization of a rule of a particular class¹¹.

In my own research I will use the world system approach of the Italian school in the field of International Relations, whose focus is on the power of hegemonic historic blocs in the international system, and whose perspective has Gramsci's premises as its theoretical precepts. The difference between the Amsterdam and the Italian world system schools is that the former focuses more on the influence of the international systemic level processes and the influence of the transnational classes rather than on the influence of the domestic level in

⁸ See for instance Heikkilä-Horn 2010.

⁹ See for instance Kuronen 2010.

¹⁰ Roccu 2012, 11.

¹¹ *ibid.*

change and transformation of societies, whereas the latter gives a strong emphasis on the social and cultural implications of hegemonic historic blocs in the international system. Both schools owe their basis premises to the Frankfurt school critical theory, which was developed in the 1970s. Deeply embedded in the Neo-Gramscian perspective is the emancipatory knowledge interest and the power of knowledge as a tool to emancipate ourselves from all dominance, which figures strongly especially in the Italian school's approach. This dimension also figures strongly in my own thesis. By choosing the Italian school's theoretical perspective as the background for my thesis, I hope my thesis, again, in its humble way, will contribute to the resuscitating of the Marxist perspective in the field of International Relations.

If Marx has been resuscitated in the academic research in the field of International Relations, this trend is yet awaiting to happen in the academic research on Thai politics. Marxist research on Thai politics is fragmented, and only few researchers have taken this approach. Here, I mention only Ungpakorn, Hewison, and Glassman, who have all contributed to the missing gap in the Marxist or Gramscian academic research on Thai politics. As I see it, due to the flexibility of the Marxist methodology, the perspectives of these researchers differ, however, what is common to them, is their class-based perspective as their starting point of analysis.

This naturally raises a question of why the Marxist class analysis in academic research on Thai politics has not been popular. Firstly, historical materialism is a challenging approach in its complexity. Secondly, the Marxist approach requires that the researcher have to take into account all the political stakeholders, and study the whole picture of interactions between them in order to be able to make an analysis. This perspective poses a practical dilemma in any prospective critical Marxist/Gramscian research on Thai politics, due to the political sensitivities involved in the Thai context.

In Thailand's case, more often than not, academic research is subordinate to the "realities" of the current political crisis and its implications, and the precarious political situation in Thailand. As an example of the sensitive topics, is an analysis of monarchy as an active political actor and an economic and a political stakeholder, and the monarchy's part of the hegemonic elite rule, which position I have included in my thesis. Here, the researcher is treading on a treacherous ground indeed, since Thailand has an extremely harsh lese majesty jurisdiction. Should his/her research be considered insulting or critical of monarchy in any

way, the researcher could easily find him/herself out of work, financial resources, and in the extreme case, charged with Lese Majeste, which bears extremely harsh jail sentences. This has led many a researcher to make adjustments in his/her research, to comply with the boundaries defined by the hegemonic politico-ideological regime, which, of course, is deplorable from the standpoint of academic freedom, integrity and academic knowledge production. As the academic, David Streckfuss says in Ivarsson-Isager's book on monarchy and democracy in Thailand, "Saying the Unsayable":

"Reasoned discussion on monarchy in Thailand...has until recently become not only "unsayable" but virtually unimaginable"¹².

The second sensitive topic concerning doing Marxist research on Thai politics is the researcher's running the risk of being labelled a dissident – because of the risk of the hegemonic regime's notion of equalling Marxism with "communism". "Communism" here refers to the negative connotation of being anti-Thai, being in opposition to as what "Thainess" is about¹³. For an international researcher, this involves the risk of being labelled a dissident –an opponent of the regime, or the risk of not being taken seriously in the academic research community on Thai politics context. This has a lot to do with Thailand's problematic history with communism after the WWII¹⁴. Thus, if the researcher says he/she is doing Marxist research, including monarchy in the analysis, this automatically posits him/her against the prevailing hegemonic order and accepted social practices, and his/her research becomes dubious, to say the least, in the current Thai political context. The sensitivity of the topic also shows in many of the sources used in this thesis: even though the sources are well acknowledged within the academic community, their publication and distribution is done via free access online websites, not via academic publications.

Despite the challenges presented above, I have chosen the Gramscian approach in my thesis. When one looks at the current crisis from the Gramscian perspective, firstly, the class nature of the current conflict becomes much clearer. Secondly, the factors that distort the form of the current conflict¹⁵, fade to the background, and appear as part of the dialectic movement of attempts of the masses to break the hegemonic rule of the elite networks, and the elite networks' attempt to preserve the status quo, respectively. Thirdly, and what is most important, from this perspective, the organic crisis of the hegemonic elite network regime

¹² Streckfuss 2010, 131.

¹³ Chachavalpongpun 2005, 6.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 46-48.

¹⁵ Phrase by Ungpakorn 2010.

itself, emerges, by which I mean the crisis of the strong, monolithic Thai state, under which the Thai elites' interests are unified and through which they are reproduced in society in social practices. The masses, the civil society, are contesting these practices in the realm of politics – they have no unified ideology, as in the realm of the struggle for power, the form of conflict configures the strategy the regime transforms itself to use to retain the power¹⁶.

This organic crisis of the state, i.e. the crisis of state authority is the central theme of my thesis. The leitmotif of this thesis is my proposal of the emergence of a new phase in Thai politics since the 1997-98 South East Asian crises, a new paradigm, where the old order is crumbling, and the masses emerge as a collective force, a motor for social change. In this transformation process, social change emerges from change in the economic base of society – in the international system of societies. The domestic level and the international level are always intertwined, as the economic changes in the international system reflect the changes in a particular local system and vice versa¹⁷.

3. THE THEME OF THE THESIS; THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of my thesis is to look into and outline the dynamics of the current historical Thai political crisis, the crisis of Thai democracy, which began when the military ousted the hugely popular, democratically elected Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatt in 2006¹⁸. Since 2006, Thailand has been a deeply divided society, characterized by a class conflict between the rural and the urban poor and the old royalist conservative elites who form the dominant social strata of Thai society¹⁹. The crisis has led to the polarization of Thai society into two main opposite groups, whose shirt colours and other insignia designate their loyalties: the “Yellow Shirts” and the “Red Shirts,” the former representing the supporters of the conservative elites and the latter representing the movement of the urban and the rural poor²⁰.

¹⁶ Rodan – Jayasuriya 2006.

¹⁷ See for example Gramsci 2007, 116.

¹⁸ “Thai PM deposed in Military Coup”, BBC News 20/09/2006.

¹⁹ Ungpakorn 2010, 9.

²⁰ See for instance Chambers 2010.

The class conflict has brought the old social and political divisions of Thai society on the surface in the terrain of political struggle for power between various social forces²¹. These old social and political divisions – the antagonistic tension between the conservative elites and the urban and the rural poor - have their roots in Thailand's development processes under the economic system of capitalism, and they reach back all the way to the late 19th century when Thailand was transformed into a modern capitalist state under the Western expansion of colonialism²².

Besides being an open, confrontational class conflict, the current historical Thai political crisis can be characterized as a crisis of Thai democracy. Thailand has suffered from continuous social and political unrest since 2006, the unrest culminating in the military crackdown of political street protests in April-May 2010 when over 90 people died and thousands were injured in the aftermath of the protests²³. Thailand has undergone another wave of street protests since November 2013, due to the controversial amnesty bill proposed by the ruling Phuea Thai Party, which would have given blank amnesty to the politicians and generals who gave the orders to use violence in the 2010 crackdown²⁴. Moreover, the blanket amnesty bill would have given the ex-Premier Taksin Shinawatra an amnesty for his alleged misuse of his political position for economic gain, and a chance to return to Thailand from exile²⁵. When I am writing this, Thailand's political crisis continues.

The crisis, as I see it, has led to the disintegration of both the political and the judicial system of Thailand. Moreover, another by-product of the crisis is the partial liquidation of the Red Shirt social movement in the 2011 parliamentary elections when part of the Red Shirt Movement supporters joined the Phuea Thai Party. Despite presenting themselves as the voice of the Red Shirts, the reigning Phuea Party is a curious mix of old Thai opportunist politicians and Red Shirt representatives²⁶. The Phuea Thai Party won the elections in 2011, and Taksin Shinawat's politically inexperienced sister Yingluck Shinawat became the Prime Minister²⁷.

A lot of criticism has been voiced on the Phuea Thai government's inactivity in pressing any significant economic and political reforms during their reign. The strongest criticism has been directed to the fact that Yingluck's Phuea Thai government has continued the policies of

²¹ Taylor 2012a.

²² Ungpakorn 2010, 9.

²³ Taylor 2012b, 289-90.

²⁴ The Guardian 05/11/2013.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ The Economist 05/05/2011.

²⁷ Szepp – Petty 2011. Reuters News 03/07/2011.

increased repression of political dissent, which began after the military coup of 2006, and which has been extremely harsh during the Abhisit Vejjajiva government²⁸. Abhisit government's human right record is abysmal, from the use of the Lese Majeste legislation and Computer Crimes Act as a tool to silent opposition, to the military crackdown of the protest in April-May 2010, and to the harsh sentences given to those who took part in the protests three years ago²⁹.

Thus, the way I see it, the current historical Thai political crisis is both a class conflict and a crisis of Thai democracy. The class conflict is rooted in the base structure of society and inequalities derived from the production relations during the development processes of Thailand's capitalist system in the context of the global society; however, the current crisis of democracy is happening on the level of the superstructure, the ideological level of society. That includes the political institutions, cultural, social and political practices, where the vertical institutionalized hegemonic power structures of society, ultimately the Thai state itself, is contested by different segments of anti-hegemonic configurations of civil society.

The locus of the form of the current class conflict between the Thai conservative elites and the people happens on the superstructure level of the society, on the ideological level. The current situation where there is a deep divide between Thai elites and the masses, is what Gramsci describes as a historical situation of a "the war of position" between different social forces. All these social forces involved in the conflict are willing to throw all political and moral resources they can come up with, into the political struggle for power, in order to achieve a genuine dialectical win over their opponent³⁰. This type of situation arises when there is what Gramsci calls a crisis of authority in a society; Gramsci calls it a crisis of hegemony, the general crisis of the State³¹.

Superficially, the history of modern Thailand presents itself as a continuum of cycles of military rule and sporadic episodes of democratic rule³². Since the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand has experienced 18 military coups³³. This recurrent cycle of the military rule and the civilian rule has created the widely used notion in the Thai context of the so-called "Thai-style democracy," which more or less means a rule by a government, whose

²⁸ Chambers 2014. University of Nottingham China Policy Institute Blog 25/02/2014; Ungpakorn 2014, 3-4.

²⁹ Ungpakorn 2014.

³⁰ Gramsci 2007, 105-108.

³¹ *ibid*, 210.

³² See for instance Farrelly 2013.

³³ Horn 2010, Time Magazine 08/04/2010.

authority is not derived from the mandate from the people, won in free elections³⁴. The concept of “Thai style democracy” is the favourite term of the dominant strata of Thai society to justify the regulation of participation of the people in the political decision-making processes – and justify the removal of a government whenever deemed necessary by the ruling elites; all in the name of “introducing, restoring, or saving democracy,” as Ferrara³⁵ sums it up. The curious position of Thai monarchy as an essential part of this “Thai-style democracy” is another interesting feature of the Thai-style democracy, which will be handled later in this thesis.

The “Thai-style democracy” is a stark contrast as to the notion of democracy brought forward by the rural and the urban poor, the ruled, whose idea of democracy involves the notion of the participation of the masses in the political decision-making. The attempts to achieve this aim and the demands of social justice have invariably ended in the Thai military’s violent crackdown of mass protests, as happened in 1973, in 1976, in 1992, in 2009 and in 2010³⁶.

In my thesis, I will try to interpret and outline the dynamics of the current historical Thai political crisis from the Gramscian perspective of social transformation and change. The central analytical tool in my work is Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis, the essence of which is the notion of the function of hegemony; his theory of historic blocs and their hegemonic position in society, which I will apply in the Thai context firstly, to denote the long-term class struggle in Thai society between the hegemonic rule of the elites and the subaltern masses. Secondly, the other side of the conflict is the intra-elite struggle, where the old elites and those fractions of elites, who want to modernize Thailand - as represented by Taksin Shinawatra – fight in between themselves for the hegemonic power position in Thai society.

The central theme of my thesis project is my proposal that, in Thai politics, a completely new paradigm - or a completely new generative phase - has emerged, the implications of which remain to be seen. This new phase began in the aftermath of the 1997-98 Southeast Asian economic crises when the business tycoon Taksin Shinawat emerged in Thai political scene. Taksin became the Prime Minister elect in 2001, as the result of his populist Thai Rak Thai Party political platform, which included reallocating resources to rural areas in from of cheap loans. Taksin also introduced Thailand’s first national health care scheme. Taksin stayed in

³⁴ Ferrara 2010, 21.

³⁵ Ferrara 2010, 21.

³⁶ Ungpakorn 2010, 19-21; 129-133; 140-147.

power until the Thai army ousted him in a military coup in 2006. Since 2006, Thailand has been undergoing a political crisis.

During this new phase, the old hegemonic order of the ruling elite networks is beginning to dissolve, and the masses have begun to emerge in the realm of Thai politics as a strong, class-conscious counterhegemonic force. Their demands of social justice, democracy, and participation in decision-making are challenging the old ruling elite networks regime, which has ruled Thailand since Siam was transformed into a modern capitalist state in the late 19th century. The current historical political crisis in this perspective, as I see it, is a continuation of this counterhegemonic process, and just one manifestation of the breaking down of the old hegemonic power structures.

Essential to Gramsci's theory of hegemony are the concepts of "passive revolution" and the "war of position." In this analysis, the focus of the study is in the totality of forces imbued in the struggle for power of the various social formations of the society. The analysis happens on two levels simultaneously, as the transformation of the Thai society has to be seen against the backdrop of the hegemonic processes in the international system over time.

The reason why I have opted to apply the Gramscian perspective as the theoretical framework in my thesis is partly due to my own ontological and epistemological choices, partly due to complicated nature of the Thai class conflict – and partly due to the flexibility of the Gramscian analysis of historical situations in studying political phenomena. In order to get a syncretic picture of the crisis and the class conflict imbued within it, I find it essential to study the whole dynamics of the interactions between the conflicting actors, not just fragments of it. The Gramscian perspective in my opinion offers a fruitful perspective for this type of a syncretic analysis.

Instead of relying on secondary sources and various interpretations of Gramsci's fragmented texts in my own research, I have mostly formed my theoretical perspective from Gramsci's original writings, written between the years 1929 and 1935 in prison. Gramsci himself emphasized the use of a thinker's original texts in analysis of situations, in order for the researcher to identify those elements in a thinker's intellectual work that form the core of his/her thinking³⁷. The same philosophy applies to the theoretical framework of the world system approach in my work: I have opted the elements from their work that I find relevant to

³⁷ Gramsci 2007, 382-383.

my thesis. By combining by both Gramsci's original texts and the Italian School's theory of hegemonic historic blocs in the world system, I hope to convey a syncretic picture of the dynamics of the current Thai political crisis. Moreover, I hope that this perspective will shed light to the central theme of this thesis: this crisis is a manifestation of a new phase in Thai politics, which began after the 1997-98 South East Asian economic crises. Now one might ask what relevance a European political theorist's analyses on the late 19th century Italy have to do with modern Thailand's political processes. Gramsci³⁸ is of the opinion that the function of hegemony is applicable in culturally different contexts, as in every country, the logic of the creation process of hegemony, its consolidation and its crisis - the development of the ruled masses as a counterhegemonic unified force to challenge the ruling classes' hegemony, is the same.

Hence, when formulating the scope and the theme of my thesis, the questions I was looking answers for in my study were for, instance:

- What are the relations of force in Thai society like? What are the historical, evolutionary processes behind the deep social and political crisis between the haves and the have-nots that has engulfed Thailand since the military coup of 2006? How do the power relations manifest themselves in the level of superstructure (cultural, political and ideological practices) in different historical situations in Thai society and how has the afore proposed situation of the "crisis of authority" and the "war of position," respectively, emerged?
- How and why did the elites develop their hegemony in all spheres of society in Thailand, and how is the elite networks' hegemony connected to changes in the international economic structures?
- Why does the military play a strong role in Thai politics? The current Thai political crisis has brought the military to the forefront in Thai politics again, a strong contrast to the military's role in the economic boom of the 1990s, when the military was rendered in the background in Thai politics.
- When thinking about Thailand's social change and my proposal that a new phase in Thai politics has begun since the 1997-98 economic crisis, how are the positions of the social forces different now from the mass uprisings of 1973 and 1976? How did the Red Shirts social movement emerge as a counter-hegemonic oppositional force to challenge the hegemony of the elites: how can

³⁸ Gramsci 2007, 210.

their position be defined, when situated into the context of the relations of force in Thai society?

4. THESIS STRUCTURE

Following my research question, my thesis is divided in the following main chapters: the introduction, the ontological and the epistemological basics of my research (which includes methodology used), the theoretical framework, the analysis, and the conclusions arrived at in the end of my thesis process.

The introductory part consists of the introduction, the objective of the study and the knowledge gap recognized in research, the research question, and the prior research findings.

The ontological and the epistemological basics of my research are discussed in chapters six and seven, respectively. Chapter 6 handles the ontological aspects of Gramscian approach, which derive directly from classical Marxism. In this chapter, I have included also a short discussion on two points, which to some extent have been criticized as being the problematic points of Marxist analysis in the academic research: determinacy and class.

In chapter seven, I clarify the epistemological premises inherent in the Marxist perspective, and present the basic underlying presuppositions of Gramscian approach in relation to knowledge and consciousness. After that, I will introduce the method that I have used in my thesis, which is Gramsci's philosophy of praxis.

Chapter eight deals with the theoretical framework of my thesis. In my thesis, I have formulated my theoretical framework by combining the original Gramscian theory of hegemony and the world system approach of the Neo-Gramscian school. Hence, chapter eight is divided into two sub-chapters, in which both the theoretical framework and the concepts used are presented. In the first sub-chapter, the central concept of the Gramscian philosophy of praxis, the theory of hegemony, is presented. In the second sub-chapter, the deepening of the Gramscian theory of hegemony of the Neo-Gramscian Italian School is discussed, with the focus on the hegemonic historic blocs on the systemic level of the international society.

Chapters 9, ten, and eleven comprise the actual analysis part of my thesis. The analysis happens through a historical analysis of the function of hegemony in Thai society, and consists of three parts: the creating of, the consolidating of, and the breaking down of the elite networks' hegemony in Thai society. As these local processes happen against the backdrop of the hegemonic processes in the international system, the creation of, the consolidation of, and the breakdown of hegemony in Thai society, is analysed against the structural changes in the international system. In the analysis, this is done by mirroring the processes on the local level against the Italian School's framework of historic hegemonic blocs in the world system. These historic blocs are Pax Britannica, Pax Americana and oligopolistic neoliberalism. Hence, chapter nine focuses on how the elite networks' hegemony was created inside the old Siam when Siam was transformed into a modern capitalist state against the backdrop of the expansion of the then-time hegemonic historic bloc of the Pax Britannica. This happened through building the alliance of the elite networks, the military and the bureaucracy, whose interests were unified under a strong state modelled after the Western nation-state. Chapter ten focuses on the consolidating the hegemony of the local elite networks and their rule after the second World War under the US economic aid, masked under the notion of development, to promote the American neoliberalist systematic program of Pax Americana. Herein, the strengthening of the position of the Thai military is of special focus, as well as the reinstating of the Thai monarchy as an ideological tool to serve the interests of the local elite networks and the military to keep the ruled in control. In chapter eleven, the beginning of the breakdown of the Thai elite networks' rule is discussed against the backdrop of the historic bloc of oligopolistic neoliberalism. This includes an analysis to Thailand's economic crisis in 1997-98, its social and political implications, and the emergence of the masses as an active political agent in the realm of Thai politics.

In chapter twelve, the conclusions of the research, as well as future possibilities for research are presented.

5. PRIOR RESEARCH

The bulk of the mainstream academic research on Thai politics, as Ungpakorn³⁹ classifies it, consists of the so-called “top-to-bottom” approaches, in which Thai politics is presented as a realm consisting of the interplay of structural-functional elite networks –the bureaucrats, the

³⁹ Ungpakorn 2010, 52.

technocrats, and the military. As the academic research on Thai politics has its roots in the Pax Americana era when the American influence on higher education was at its highest point, this research approach naturally has its roots in the American tradition of political science research, in which the focus of the research is on the structural-functional framework of society and its political institutions.

In Thai particular context, the modernization of that framework in Thailand to comply with Western norms of stability, development, and the Western ideals of “democratization” dominated the research until the 1990s⁴⁰. The ultimate classic in this research tradition is *Fred Riggs’ Thailand. The Modernisation of a Bureaucratic Polity* (1966)⁴¹. This type of research ultimately does not include the perspective of the masses or the civil society as active unit and an agent in the interplay of political actors in the equation of analysis. Mass participation in politics, people’s demands on social justice, social equality, equal participation in decision-making, and people’s demands on democracy as focal starting points for analysis are not of primary importance in this type of an analysis.

Of the current researcher of Thai politics, Michael Kelly Connors follows the Riggsian top-down tradition in his extensive research on Thai politics. His shift from the Riggsian tradition is mainly in his combining the social constructivist approach with the structural-functionalist one, and applying Gramscian concepts taken out of the Gramscian framework into his perspective. His emphasis is on the discursive struggle of the hegemonic state networks to retain their regime over the years. In his extensive book, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand* (2007), Connors discusses the notions of democracy in Thai context from a constructivist perspective, and proposes the term ‘democrasubjection’, which refers to his critical notion that both liberal and static moments of democracy in Thailand are projects aimed at the subjection of people to imaginary forms of self and collective rule⁴². This in practice means that under the notion of democracy, people can be subject to ideological practices of power and power interests through imagined myths like nation state and national myths, for instance.

Despite Connors’ critical approach and his articulating the ideological dimension of various regime policies, his research still falls under the top-down approach and within the Riggsian tradition, as the masses, who are the targets of the democrasubjection, are not presented as

⁴⁰ Ungpakorn 2010, 52.

⁴¹ See Riggs 1966.

⁴² Connors 2007, 3-5.

truly active agents. Connors consequently for instance, sees the military coup of 2006 and the ensuing political crisis as a failure of royal liberalism in his article “*Article of Faith: the Failure of Royal Liberalism in Thailand*”⁴³. In this article he analyses the post-2006 political crisis as being a shift between two notions of democracy, whose contents were driven by two different types of interests, Taksin’s on one hand - and on the other hand, the notion of democracy of the royalist social forces, who is joining together against Taksin in 2005-2006 ultimately caused the military coup in 2006⁴⁴.

Duncan McCargo has written extensively on Thai politics, and the problem of the six Malay Southern provinces in Thailand and their relationship to the central government institutions. His research, despite following the top-down research tradition, is significant in identifying and articulating the elite networks, network of patronage, in governing Thai politics, as he sees it. McCargo, in his article “*Network Monarchy and the Legitimacy Crises in Thailand*”, replaces the notion of the Riggsian bureaucratic polity with the term “network monarchy”, by which McCargo means the network of elites close to the palace that actually ruled Thailand between the years 1973-2001, without them however gaining dominance in politics⁴⁵. This rearticulation and modernization of the Riggsian analytical framework, with new concepts, as an interpretative tool of how the realm of Thai politics functioned in that era, has created a new concept in the international academic research on Thai politics, and is widely used now.

Two other current international researchers of the top-down perspective into Thai politics are worth mentioning here, as they relate to my own analysis in the respect that they have analysed the position of monarchy with merit. Paul Handley’s book *The King Never Smiles* is well-researched book, which offers an insight to the sensitive topic of monarchy’s prominent role in Thai politics, from the days the current King Pumipon was made the King, after the heir to the throne, Pumipon’s brother, King Ananda, accidentally lost his life in 1946, until the military coup of 2006⁴⁶. The book’s importance lies in how it is set against and how it mirrors the economic, social, and political context of the long period of Pumipon’s reign as a monarch, and how the palace networks have influenced Thai politics throughout Pumipon’s reign.

Scottish journalist Andrew MacGregor Marshall has also written extensively on Thai monarchy since 2011, when he published his first study on Thai monarchy and the

⁴³ Connors 2008.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 143-144.

⁴⁵ McCargo 2005.

⁴⁶ Handley 2006.

monarchy's interaction with the Thai authoritarian regimes since the late 1940s online, called “#thaistory. Thailand's Moment of Truth: A Secret History of 21st Century Siam”⁴⁷. MacGregor Marshall sees the succession to the throne at the heart of the current Thai political crisis.

Gramscian –or Marxist class-based analysis on Thai politics is very fragmented in the field of international relations. This might be due to the fact (which can be disputed) that the Gramscian perspective is a challenging one for the researcher, as it requires a comprehensive analysis of the whole picture of the totality of the power relations in society, and it sees social change as an organic process. There is gap in Marxist research when it comes to research in Thai politics exactly for this reason: one has to include all political stakeholders in creating an analysis of the totality of power relations, including all the social configurations of power in the process. In authoritarian societies as Thailand is, this fact causes problems to the researcher, because the researcher cannot touch certain sensitive topics, whose boundaries are defined by the authoritarian regime. In Thailand, as mentioned earlier, the topic of monarchy, which is considered a sensitive topic of national security, cannot be included in an analysis of the power structures because of the Lèse Majesté legislation. This is one of the reasons, why conclusive Marxist research on Thai politics is very fragmented and difficult to find.

Despite the problematic position of doing academic Marxist research on Thai politics in the field of international relations, and despite the neglect of similar research to my own thesis, there are a few researchers, who have used the Marxist/Gramscian perspective in their research on Thai politics, and from whose work I have drawn upon in my thesis.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn has written extensively on the totality of power relations in Thai society from the Marxist perspective during the past twenty years, including analyses of the monarchy. In many respects, his research is closest to my own perspective in many respects. His perspective is understandably more extensive than the limited scope and theme of my own thesis; however, his basic premises are similar to mine, and I have used his research extensively in my own research.

In his books “*Thailand's Crisis & the Fight for Democracy*” (2010) and “*Coup for the Rich*” (2007), Ungpakorn sees the post-2006 coup crisis in Thailand as a class conflict between the urban and the rural poor and the various sections of the royalist conservative elites, whose network the King is part of, as a political and an economic stakeholder. This class conflict

⁴⁷ MacGregor Marshall 2011.

derives from the inequalities, which are imminent in the development processes of capitalism in Thailand. Ungpakorn sees that the real power in Thai society lies with the military, whose task is to guarantee the elites' hegemonic rule in the class struggle against the people. Ungpakorn sees that the King and the military operate in dual reciprocity: the military has the power to manipulate the politics with the help of the conservative ideology the King represents and this conservative ideology gives the military the legitimacy for their actions. Thus, the King is a useful tool for the elites and the military to preserve their hegemonic rule.

Kevin Hewison is another academic researcher who has written extensively on the current Thai political crisis from the Neo-Gramscian perspective and whose work is relevant in the context of my thesis. Hewison's detailed contributions to the structural analysis on Thailand's economic development in the Thai Rak Thai Party era between 2001-2006 and its social implications, has been extremely helpful in formulating the underlying central argument of my thesis. For example, in his article, "*Thaksin Shinawatra and the reshaping of Thai politics*,"⁴⁸ Hewison tackles similar questions as I do in my thesis. Hewison writes about the transformative power of the Taksin era, which he sees began during the Southeast Asian economic crisis in 1997-98. Hewison aptly points out the "revolution" of the Thai Rak Thai policies on the economic and politico-ideological restructuring of Thai society⁴⁹.

Hewison's also analyses about Taksin's rift with the palace, his ousting through the royally approved military coup 2006 - and on the other hand, his huge popularity with the masses and his ability to politically mobilize the masses, brought the politicization of monarchy in public discourse, despite the elites' liturgy of the monarchy being above politics. Hewison also refers to the intangible effects of Taksin's transformative influence: it revealed old power structures and changed the nature of political debate in Thailand forever – due to the repressive regulations and censorship, a considerable part of the political debate is being waged on various forums on the internet, for instance in social media.⁵⁰

Hewison also mirrors the interplay between the domestic and the international levels and reflects upon the interplay of domestic economic, social, and political processes against the respective processes on the international level in his research in a way that is very close to my own research.

⁴⁸ Hewison 2010, 119-133.

⁴⁹ Hewison 2005.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Another pair of researchers, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, focus on the interplay of the domestic and the international level of analysis in their research. Their work focuses on the economic analyses of Thailand in various historical contexts, against the backdrop of systemic international change. Their research cannot be characterized as based directly on Marxist approach; however, the focus of the bulk of their extensive research is in the structural economic organisation of Thai society and its social implications. In their book, *“Thailand’s Crisis”* (1997), Phongpaichit and Baker give a detailed account on Thailand’s economic crisis of 1997-98, and the huge change the IMF-induced measures implemented caused in Thailand’s political system.

Phongpaichit and Baker bring another detailed perspective on the effects of the 1997-98 economic crises in *“Thai Capital after the 1997-98 Crisis,”* a compilation of various academics’ perspectives on the effects of the economic crisis on various Thai domestic industries. The focus of the book is on the relationship between the domestic capital and the pressure of the multinational industries during and after the crisis.

Regarding the interplay of domestic and international levels, Robert Cox and Stephen Gill’s research on the hegemonic historic blocs initially prompted me to create my theoretical framework. Revisiting Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks deepened the understanding of Gramscian perspective. However, Roberto Roccu’s PhD thesis *“Gramsci in Cairo: Neoliberal Authoritarianism, Passive Revolution and Failed Hegemony in Egypt under Mubarak 1991-2010”*⁵¹ was of decisive importance in helping to finally put my own research together. The aim of Roccu’s analysis is to revive the applicability of the Gramscian method in analysing, in his case, the relationship between the international economic neoliberalism, the realm of the Egyptian economy and its social and political effects in Egypt. In his study Roccu contrasts Cox and Gill throughout his analysis, by emphasizing the forms of change and transformation of the Egyptian hegemonic power structures that emerge on a local level, to break the hegemony of the local oligarchs, instead of stressing the priority of the structural changes on the international system level bringing about change and transformation on the domestic level.

He interprets the Gramscian analysis so that the domestic level is more important than the international level in the process of the function of hegemony. The local particular context – the local hegemonic processes embodied in the Egyptian state and its institutions retain their

⁵¹ Roccu 2012.

independence from the international level, in formatting the particular change that happened in Egypt and its hegemonic structures, a 'failed hegemony', as Roccu calls it. Hence, the change ultimately happens on a local level in a local particular context - rather than as a determined, direct result of international systemic level changes, which Roccu sees as a weakness of the Italian school approach. Even though Roccu's analysis is about the breakdown of the hegemony of the elites in Egypt, and thus the context is different; however, there are certain similarities as to the forms of change and transformation has happened in the Thai context, on a domestic level. In Roccu's study, as opposed to my own, the approach is a top-down approach, focusing on the change in the hegemonic local structures. He leaves the analysis of the emergence of the counter-hegemonic forces out of his study.

6. ONTOLOGY: HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

This chapter deals with the basic ontological tenets of classical Marxism, as the Gramscian approach is based on these premises. A brief discussion on allegedly problematic points in the ontology of classical Marxism follows the questions of determinacy and class.

6.1. Historical materialism and politics as a possibility

The basic ontological premises of my work are initially situated on Marx's theory of society, social transformation, and social change. This approach entails its own ontology to the relationship between man and nature, which is historical dialectical materialism. The central concepts for this approach are production and class. Production creates consciousness of one's position in society and understanding social relations through understanding the relationship between one's class and the prevailing mode of production⁵². The Frankfurt school of International Relations developed Marx's ideas further in their critical theory,

⁵² Gramsci 2007, 402.

developing the concept of Marx's original notion of *critique* as the method to develop social sciences further⁵³.

Patomäki's view⁵⁴ sums the Marxist ontology as follows: firstly, the world exists, independent of our knowledge of it. The world consists of layers and structures, which we have to identify and differentiate in order to understand the world around us. There are causal powers at work in the world around us. If there did not exist causal powers in the world, we would not be able to know anything about it. As the society is an open system - like the nature is, ultimately, the conception of causality means "structured powers capable of producing particular effects *if actualized*"⁵⁵.

Here, the conception of politics as *possibility*, and the premise of the emancipatory knowledge interest come into play. It is up to us to identify and realize the possibilities within the structures and layers of the outside world. However, we must keep in mind that the key word here is possibility: the possible outcomes may happen or they may *not* happen.

Gramsci develops the significance of the notion of possibility further when he ponders over the question: what is man? He concludes that a human being has to be understood "as an historic bloc of both subjective elements and of objective material conditions with which the individual is in an active relationship."⁵⁶ In a certain historical context, the notion of the possibility of changing the objective material conditions emerges – the measuring unit being the extent to which man dominates nature and chance⁵⁷. Hence, as Gramsci says: "Possibility is not reality; but it is *in itself* a reality"⁵⁸. The notion of possibility embodies the idea of freedom; nevertheless, in order to attain freedom and change the world, ethical improvement of oneself alone is an illusion for as long as a human being does not direct his/her activity outwards to change both the material conditions and the relationships with other human beings⁵⁹

Patomäki sums Gramsci's notion of the significance of possibility as follows: both the structures of the world and the researchers studying the world possess causal powers. As different layers of reality (biological, human, social) are basic ontological units and causally

⁵³ Patomäki 2002, 6-8.

⁵⁴ Patomäki 2002, 8.

⁵⁵ Gramsci 2007, 369; 372.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 360.

⁵⁷ *ibid*.

⁵⁸ *ibid*.

⁵⁹ *ibid*.

intertwined, the notions of *absence and emergence* are just as real as the existence of things. This possibility of the notions of existence – and absence and emergence of things – suggests that the ideas of the process of change and transformation process are also possible.⁶⁰

6.2. Two dilemmas of classical Marxism: Determinacy and Class

In Marxist historical materialism, social change is conditioned by the economic mode of production of the society. Here, we irrevocably stumble at the classical dilemma and the debate about the problematic of the relationship between social formation and class determinacy. By this, I refer to the position of the *class* at the heart of the historical analysis of a society, and how that particular class's ideology corresponds to its class position.

Stuart Hall specifically assesses these two dilemmas in his article “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates” (1985)⁶¹.

Marx has often been interpreted to propose that a class position in the economic relations in a direct, predetermined way, determines the class's ideology⁶². The theoretical position here is that the class relations of the capitalist mode of production - a structure in dominance - are constantly reproduced through the hegemonic ideology in a predetermined way. This will continue until the exploited social underclass, in their developing a practice of struggle, develops a conscious unity in action; transforms itself into a social movement; and transforms the social formation into a different one in an undefined temporal conjuncture⁶³.

Accordingly, we could take a highly simplified and deterministic view of the Russian revolution in 1917 as being a predetermined revolution of the Russian proletariat united behind a single ideology, which corresponded directly to their social position in the Russian social structure⁶⁴. On the other hand, we could look at the development of the Red Shirt movement in Thailand through a similar perspective, taking the position that the Red Shirts

⁶⁰ Patomäki 2002, 6-8. See also Gramsci 2007, 367-372 on objective knowledge and the notion of existence, and his critique of Kant.

⁶¹ See Hall 1985.

⁶² Hall 1985, for comparison, see Gramsci 2007, 52-55. Gramsci emphasizes the heterogeneity of ideologies and interests in any class formation throughout his work.

⁶³ Hall 1985, 93-95.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 95.

movement is unified behind one ideology, which corresponds directly to the Red Shirts' social position in the Thai social structure. This certainly is not the case. Social totality is more complex than that.

What happened in Russia in 1917, for instance, was what Hall quotes in Lenin's words, was that the 1917 revolution happened "as a result of a very unique historical situation, absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings merged in a strikingly harmonious manner"⁶⁵. In Thailand, as well as anywhere else, as for that matter, the process is very different. The uprising may happen or it may not happen.

The "revolution" – i.e. the breakdown of the hegemonic structures, may happen – but it may not happen just as well, and it certainly is not the predetermined product of an obscure determinacy of the correspondence between the class position and ideology.

Althusser proposes solving this classical dilemma of the Marxist theory in conceptualizing the significance of recognizing *difference* when we analyse social totality: there are different social contradictions, with different social results, in different temporal contexts, which all form the driving force of a historical process, the results and the effects of which are different in each process⁶⁶. It is through acknowledging and articulating the *difference*, where determinacy emerges from⁶⁷. Thus, when we look at the dilemma of class and its correspondence with an ideology, the determinacy can be found in that there is no necessary correspondence between the social position and ideology – but there is no non-correspondence, either⁶⁸.

Even though Althusser conceptualized the significance of the notion of difference, it does not mean that we should fetishize the notion of "difference" in any way. Recognizing and articulating the "difference" simply changes the perspective of the classical dilemma of determinacy in Marxist research altogether. In research, Althusser's notion of articulating this difference enables us to look at a societal process in a syncretic way, seeing the unity in difference⁶⁹. It retains the value of Marx's theory and honours its complexity, its flexibility, and its applicability – and it helps us to analyse the prismatic nature of the social totality and

⁶⁵ Hall 1985, 98.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 92. See also Althusser 1962.

⁶⁷ Hall 1985, 92.

⁶⁸ *ibid*. 94.

⁶⁹ Althusser 1962.

its processes. I find this perspective and the flexibility in analysis that it opens up, extremely helpful in outlining the dynamics of the current Thai political crisis, and the crises – the uprisings or the struggle, if you like - that preceded it. Each political crisis is different. What is the unifying factor common to political crises is, are the processes of the economic organization of the mode of production, and the interacting processes between the mode of production and the cultural and social realm.

There is another classical dilemma about the Marxist analysis: *the class* as the starting point of the analysis. Marxist analysis is firmly rooted in European experience, so we might ask ourselves if it is a valid conceptual category in social analysis of other types of social contexts, like the Thai society for instance. This problem, in my opinion, can be overcome through thinking about the concept of class as an analytical tool of a subject's experience, how a subject identifies him/herself in relation to society⁷⁰. Thus, in my work, the concept of “class” does not refer to a class as a homogenic whole. Instead, I see the concept of “class” in a “decentred” sense⁷¹. Gramsci, in his analysis, as I see it, always emphasized the complexity of social processes, including the experiencing of a “class,” emphasizing the decentred sense of a class experience⁷².

7. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREMISES

In this chapter, I will present the epistemological premises of the Gramscian approach. The questions of knowledge and consciousness are also discussed. The first subchapters serve as an introduction and a clarification to the Gramscian method of the philosophy of praxis, which forms the methodological basis of my thesis.

7.1. On the nature of knowledge

Marxism's epistemological stance is relativistic. Knowledge is socially produced, it is always contextual – and knowledge is fallible. The knowledge of the world, just like the world itself,

⁷⁰ As in Morley-Chen 1996, 18.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Gramsci 2007, 52-55.

is layered and structured reaching from strong universal claims on to scientific theories and to reflective interpretations of social meanings. The knowledge of the world is based on the pre-existing means of production, resources, and technologies plus the historically transient concepts, and intuition and imagination of the researcher; hence, the social science is more reflective and relies on models and analogies more than natural sciences do. All this implies a more extensive reflective interpretation dimension than the natural sciences; however, the epistemological relativism and the interpretative element also imply the idea of rationality and possibility of making rational, plausible judgments about their truth.⁷³

This, however, does not exclude the possibility of any judgments being proven wrong at some point – all judgments are fallible.

These epistemological presuppositions are in line with Gramscian epistemological premises, respectively. Gramsci, in his defence of Marx's thought, especially emphasized the historical context of the researcher and the researcher's constant awareness of consciousness in interpreting certain conceptions of the world borne out of the aforementioned pre-existing means of production, resources, and technologies⁷⁴. Gramsci saw the key to Marx's philosophy in Marx's *critique* of capitalism⁷⁵. The key word here is "critique," critical rational thinking as a function of consciousness, which also Gramsci advocates for. It is the critical reflective and intuitive activities of consciousness that is the *primus motor* of creating knowledge, which ultimately is fallible and can be proven wrong – the very same premise that Patomäki speaks of. Gramsci similarly emphasizes rationality as opposed to "philosophical dilettantism," and what he calls "speculative philosophy," in another context in his work⁷⁶.

Patomäki also brings up the question of social science relying on models and analogies more than natural sciences do, as mentioned earlier. For Gramsci and Marx alike, these models and analogies are an expression of language, which is the major arena of social struggle, and a prerequisite of social consciousness⁷⁷.

Hence, to specify the epistemological premises of my work further, I find it necessary to outline some basic notions of language and the Marxist theory of consciousness in the next chapter. This I find especially relevant to the Thai context of my study. The structure of the

⁷³ Patomäki 2002, 90-92; 8-9.

⁷⁴ Gramsci 2007, 381-386.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 378-382.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 324, 386.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 348-349.

Thai language per se is extremely hierarchical and rigid. One's social position is defined by his/her first utterance in Thai language. Thai language has been one of the tools of hegemonic rule by the elite networks since the introduction of the capitalist mode of production into Thailand at the end of the 19th century⁷⁸. Breaking up the taboos of the conventions of the hierarchical language has in my opinion been part of the new paradigm in Thai politics mentioned in the introductory chapter.

7.2. The terrain of social struggle: language and ideology

The departing methodological point, in my own thesis and its syncretic theoretical framework, which has Marx's ontology at its heart, lies in this nexus point of understanding the significance of language and the speech act in research. The Marxist theory of consciousness emphasizes *the connection between the language and social struggle*: that ideas have their origin in the material existence, the material conditions are the basis of social interaction, and that language, the speech act process, is the nexus point for social change. Although Marx did not pay much theoretical attention to the theory of language, he constantly handles the topic in his works concerning ideology. Marx proposes that ideas are born in the head; however, he sees that material existence presupposes the existence of ideas⁷⁹.

There are several Marxist theorists, who have paid attention to language and its speech act aspect. What is common to these researchers is their attention to the connection between language as a process emanating from the material conditions of a society and the *ideological aspect* immanent in language process. Let it be mentioned here that it is questionable if all these researchers can be classified under the category of "Marxist thinkers" due to the historical context they operated in⁸⁰.

The Russian linguist Voroshilov saw consciousness as a socio-ideological entity; the word, the ideas, the human psyche and consciousness are void per se, but find their unity in

⁷⁸ An example of this is the resuscitating of the old "Ratchasap", the royal vocabulary, into Thai language after the WWII. When talking about monarchy, special expressions and terms are used instead of everyday language.

⁷⁹ See for instance Marx 1845. Marx criticizes philosophy, which relies on "pure spirit" as opposed to ideas emerging from the economic base structure in "The Illusions of German Ideology".

⁸⁰ Parrington 1997. Volonishov and Bakhtin worked together in the Soviet Union when Stalin was in power. Therefore classifying them under the label "Marxist thinkers" is slightly risky, due to the conditions they worked in.

expression of the word, the speech act, the language⁸¹. Subsequently, consciousness can only become a fact through the embodiment of signs⁸². Signs and the word forms the semiotic chart of an individual person's inner life, however, the signs are conditioned by the social environment, which the individual lives in, and the interaction between human beings. It is at this stage of the interactive socializing process emanating from the material existence that the forming of ideologies takes place in the unity of linguistic expression, and consequently, a human psyche becomes into existence⁸³. Thus, the *ideology is immanent at every stage of the socializing process through language*. "Consciousness becomes consciousness only after it is filled with ideological value", he proposes – but to avoid determinism, he stresses the idea of unity in diversity, saying that the world of signs (filled with ideological content) is heterogeneous – for instance the artistic, the religious, the scientific formula all are connected with different orientations when it comes to reality⁸⁴. Accordingly, they all have different functions in social reality; still, due to their semiotic matrix, these diverse ideological phenomena can be understood and classified under one definition⁸⁵. Ultimately, Voroshilov sees that *"communication simply cannot be separated from its material base, and that language is where the social struggle takes place"*⁸⁶.

According to Cox⁸⁷, institutionalized social practices come into being through ideas put into practices. When it comes to understanding ideas that are relevant to a historical material structure - ideas as collective images of certain social order, as imagined by different groups of people - there is a normative principle inherent in this understanding of ideas. The normative principle means the sense that there are conflicting views on the nature and legitimacy of power relations; the meaning of certain concepts like democracy, good governance, social justice, etc., between the different groups in society. Consequently, there are different views on the strategies and on the potential for the evolving of an alternative economic material structure as the mode of organizing the mode of production in a society⁸⁸.

The speech act is also at the heart of Gramsci's notion of the language process⁸⁹. However, Gramsci's starting point regarding language is that language is the nexus point of the social

⁸¹ Voloshinov 1929. Voloshinov has influenced a few post-structuralists, including Deleuze and Lacan; see Parrington 1997.

⁸² Voloshinov 1929.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Parrington 1997.

⁸⁷ Cox 1999, 98-99.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 99.

⁸⁹ Gramsci 2007, 323-325; 348-349.

struggle and conflict. Consequently, Gramsci, like Cox, does not separate language into a separate entity to be analysed in his structural analysis of society, but places language at the heart of his political theory. Gramsci sees the significance of language as a dimension in the functioning of the hegemonic processes in a society: language by nature is an imminent, material process, which exists within the boundaries of intertwined structural societal processes. The notion of language per se is an empty notion in the sense that each human being in a society has an individual conception of the things around him/her. It is only through *collective activity*, i.e. social practices and interaction in a particular social and historical context that language produces meaning and a common understanding of the world can be reached. This common conception of can be reached through cultural-social unity, *which reflects the structures of dominance of the power relations between the heterogeneous strata of a society borne out the material base of the relations of production, and the hegemonic ideologies inherent in the structures.*⁹⁰

Gramsci strongly criticizes separating language from the material base of the societal processes further. He proposes that language works and transforms through metaphors: he does not go as far as to propose that all discourse is metaphorical in respect to the material objects – but he sees language as “metaphorical with respect to the meanings and the ideological content which the words used had in the preceding periods of civilization”⁹¹. This, in practice, includes societal processes both on the levels of the material base and the superstructure. Gramsci himself can be seen to use language as a metaphor for his political analysis.

In the end, based on the above chapters, we could draw the following conclusions: consciousness is born out of the material base of society through language. Language is the nexus of the social struggle, and it reflects the power relations in society, and is thus inseparable of the hegemonic structures of dominance in society. Ideology and hegemonic rule are always intertwined.

7.3. Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis as a method

The central theme of my thesis – my proposal of the emergence of a new paradigm in Thai politic involves some ontological and epistemological choices regarding the method and the

⁹⁰ Gramsci 2007, 450-452; 350-352.

⁹¹ *ibid*, 450.

theory. Throughout my thesis process, I found myself constantly struggling with the question of how to combine academic rigorousness and its demands with my own long-term active engagement with my research topic – and my own role as a social activist.

Leander⁹² writes that doing research in social sciences involves a two-way relationship between the questions the researcher asks, and the method and the theoretical standpoint he/she chooses: the researcher's questions relate to the methodological choices and the theoretical approach and vice versa. In my case, I decided to study my selected research topic – the dynamics of Thailand's current political crisis- from the Marxist perspective of social transformation and change. The motivation behind this perspective is an urge to do research, which is strongly connected to the practical world outside academia, and which, limited as this particular study is, can for example raise new questions in someone's mind who is reading this. I believe this type of engaged or activist research is just as valuable as any type of mainstream academic research provided, that the activist researcher obeys the standards of any research, systematically reflects upon his/her empirical experiences, and provides as an intellectually honest account of his/her research topic as possible. Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is thus the obvious methodological choice for the purpose of my thesis, due my theoretical framework and its epistemological premises, which derive from historical materialism.

My second motivation in selecting the Gramscian approach is also connected to the goals of my research in general: to bring forth to the reader the flexibility of the Gramscian method – philosophy of praxis – in conducting research in the field of international relations.

My decision to use Gramsci's original texts as the source of my selected methodological framework is based on the leitmotif of Gramsci himself on the method of doing research in general. Gramsci proposes that if one is to study the intellectual work and the world view of a researcher whose texts in any way are open to interpretation, one has to reconstruct the essential, coherent, sometimes implicit, meanings of the researcher in question, and consider his/her whole intellectual work, not just fragments of it⁹³. This analysis, as Gramsci says, has to be done "with utmost intellectual care, scientific honesty and without any a priori prejudice"⁹⁴.

⁹² Leander 2008, 12.

⁹³ Gramsci 2007, 382-383.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is a method, which Gramsci outlines in the context of his critique of German philosophy and English classical economics, again in a fragmented form throughout his *Prison Notebooks* texts. He proposes that the prerequisite to the emergence of the philosophy of praxis is the whole conception of modern life, which includes Renaissance and Reformation, German philosophy and the French Revolution and English classical economics, secular liberalism – and his own historicism, the critique of the conception of world as presented and put into practice during diverse historical epochs⁹⁵.

Gramsci initially presents his basic premises of the philosophy of praxis as a method through the critique of Western philosophy, arguing that Western philosophy is an organic, ideological, and hegemonic construction, which is close to the conception of the world of the leading group⁹⁶. He says further that this hegemonic construction will be reproduced endlessly by the hegemonic forces in a society through social practices, which ensures that the accepted form of thinking is through the function of hegemony accepted as a “natural world view,” which Gramsci calls ‘common sense’⁹⁷. This common sense is the methodological starting point for the philosophy of praxis to emerge. It equals the researcher's critique of the common sense and going beyond it, engaging in a polemic about the traditional philosophies means accepting a new perspective on the world⁹⁸. Philosophy of praxis emerges through polemics, and as Gramsci proposes, in the form of a continuous struggle⁹⁹. By this all, Gramsci refers to the process of intellectual revolution: one has to expose the hegemonic ideologies masked as ‘common sense’; however, one not only has to expose and confront these ideologies but also exposes, and confronts the social forces behind them¹⁰⁰. The ultimate resolution of this ideological struggle, as Gramsci puts it, will happen on the realm of the ‘revolutionizing praxis’, on a practical level of struggle between the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic forces, which ultimately defines the social practices that will be adopted when the old hegemonic order breaks down¹⁰¹.

Gramsci purports that it is essential that theory is not separate from practice: theory and practice must be combined¹⁰². For this purpose, the concept of hegemony and understanding the function of hegemony is essential, as it entails an understanding of the world that is

⁹⁵ Gramsci 2007, 395.

⁹⁶ *ibid*, 420-421.

⁹⁷ *ibid*.

⁹⁸ *ibid*.

⁹⁹ *ibid*, 330-331.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 322.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 322-327.

¹⁰² *ibid*, 364-365.

critical and beyond what common sense is¹⁰³. This process involves firstly, gaining an intellectual unity in the form of a multifocal understanding of the world; secondly, making a detailed historical analysis of the dynamics of a particular situation and articulating the hegemonic power structures, and finally, transforming the hegemonic order through action¹⁰⁴. It is only through understanding and awareness about the economic structures and the power relationships in a prevailing hegemonic order; through awareness of one's position in these networks, plus through the will and passion to transform the existing hegemonic order that the notion of philosophy of praxis is completed¹⁰⁵. If one has the understanding of the social order, but not the will to change it, Gramsci considers one a hypocrite in the service of the hegemonic order without a true understanding of the philosophy of praxis.

Roccu¹⁰⁶ calls Gramsci's philosophy of praxis historical dialectical materialism. Of these concepts, Gramsci's understanding of history deserves further clarification, as it is the key to understanding his dialectical materialism, and his method of the philosophy of praxis.

Gramsci's understanding of history is based on Hegelian concept of history in the sense that for Gramsci, like for Hegel, history is a progressive process¹⁰⁷. This notion purports to in itself the immanent principle of development in the process of history¹⁰⁸. The basic difference between Hegelian concept of history and the Gramscian concept of history, as Gramsci puts it, is that the Hegelian concept of history focuses on the teleological idea of the humankind attaining freedom through spiritual development¹⁰⁹. According to Gramsci, Hegel's logic of how historical processes develop through the dialectical thesis-antithesis-synthesis (a shift between materialism and idealism) process, leads to an analogy of "man walking on his head"¹¹⁰. To surpass the pitfalls of the Hegelian dialectic, Gramsci requires us to strip history of all spiritual and materialist deterministic dimensions in favour of secularization and earthliness of thought¹¹¹. This is possible through realistic historicism¹¹², which is essential in understanding Gramsci's notion of history. Realistic historicism refers to a "form of scientifically identifying an epistemological rupture with a previous ideological problematic",

¹⁰³ Gramsci 2007, 333-334.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 365-368.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, 332-333.

¹⁰⁶ Roccu 2012, 23.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*.

¹⁰⁸ Gramsci 2007, 344-345.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, 395-397.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, 396. This analogy of the Hegelian dialectic was first proposed by Marx (see Gramsci 2007, 396).

¹¹¹ *ibid*, 465.

¹¹² Gramsci talks about absolute historicism; however I have opted to use the term realistic historicism, as I find it an analytically clearer a definition.

as Thomas interprets it¹¹³. Roccu¹¹⁴ cites Gramsci that history consists of both contingency and necessity – every historical structure has according to Gramsci both organic and conjunctural points, and the methodological implication of the historicist approach is to identify and differentiate between the two types of points in history in order to articulate the ruptures. Conjunctural events do not have far-reaching historical significance, and they disappear when the elements affecting them dissolve¹¹⁵. Organic phenomena, on the contrary, have, in the Hegelian sense, the idea of necessity written upon them¹¹⁶. When we study them meticulously, we notice the dimension of crisis in them in the sense, that in an organic crisis, the structural contradictions of a certain historical structure have come to the surface so that the crisis itself is the manifestation of the incurability of these structures¹¹⁷. This is the nexus where the oppositional forces emerge to challenge the old historical structure. Herein is the nexus where the notion of opportunity as a possibility is to be positioned.

To end this chapter, if I position myself as a researcher who uses Gramsci's method of philosophy of praxis in my own engaged research, as brought forward in the beginning of this chapter, the following applies. My position as a researcher is that I cannot in the least be considered a neutral observer. My perspective stems from my own relating to the everyday experience of the "masses" and their passion in producing social change through action. My approach is normative in the sense that I am on the side of the people who ask for a greater part in political decision-making process, and who want to have their say in what "good governance" in society means. I see knowledge as doing¹¹⁸, politics as activity¹¹⁹, and I see language as a deed¹²⁰ - and I believe in the emancipatory empowerment of attaining knowledge¹²¹. Despite -or due- to my own ontological and epistemological commitments my first and foremost aim is to provide as an honest and an intellectually clear account of my thesis topic as possible.

¹¹³ Thomas 2007, 254.

¹¹⁴ Roccu 2012, 23-25.

¹¹⁵ Gramsci 2007, 177.

¹¹⁶ Roccu 2012, 24.

¹¹⁷ Gramsci 2007, 178.

¹¹⁸ Cox 1999, 28-30.

¹¹⁹ Kari Palonen has written extensively on this topic in his conceptualization of politics as activity. Even though his perspective is different from mine, for instance his work "The Struggle with Time: A Conceptual History of Politics as Activity" (2006) is highly recommended reading for any student of international relations because of its intellectual clarity regarding understanding politics as activity.

¹²⁰ Gramsci 2007, 348-349. Gramsci, like Marx, sees language as emerging from the material conditions of society through social interaction.

¹²¹ Lather 1986. Lather is of the opinion that there is no neutral research. Research is an emancipatory activity in itself.

The reason for choosing this perspective is firstly, due to the epistemological premise inherent in the Marxist theory of consciousness in relation to knowledge, which is essential to my study: we study society in order to become aware and emancipate ourselves from all forms of dominance we have created ourselves throughout the history. Emancipation and resistance towards dominance derive from awareness of the social reality we live in; awareness and vigilance empower us with will to create alternative forms of social organization that respond better to the human demands for social justice and participation in decision-making. The second reason for using the chosen approach is my aim in my own research to bring forth the significance of the ordinary people, “the ruled,” in producing social change and their unification as a social force strong enough to challenge the prevailing hegemonic politico-ideological order. As I have said earlier in this study, this bottom-to-top perspective has not attracted enough attention in the academic research on Thailand.

In my opinion, even though in a sense, interpreting a social conflict through the perspective I have adopted, is a common perspective in for instance the post-colonial research in the field of international relations, I find it somewhat neglected in Thailand’s case. This omission I would attribute firstly, the political sensitivities concerning the academic research in Thailand.

In Thailand’s case, one of the critical issues in conducting research on Thai politics is that more often than not, the academic research is influenced by the so-called “realities” of the precarious political situation in Thailand. As an example of sensitive topics in academic research here would be, for instance, an analysis of monarchy not only as an active political actor, but also as an ideological tool of the hegemonic rule of the elites in Thai politics. Reinstating monarchy was an extremely important part of consolidating the cultural hegemony of the Bangkok-centred elites in the 1950s. Still, in order to get a whole picture of the current Thai political crisis by using the method of philosophy of praxis, those sensitive topics cannot be neglected.

Here we are treading on a precarious ground indeed, since Thailand has an extremely harsh Lese Majeste jurisdiction, and should a study be considered inappropriate and critical of monarchy in any way, the researcher could easily find him/herself out of work, and in the extreme cases, charged with Lese Majeste, which bears extremely harsh jail sentences.

In my opinion, the sensitivity of the topics of the Thai politics easily leads to either the researcher compromising his/her own academic integrity; or to the researcher adjusting

his/her research within the limits set by the hegemonic politico-ideological regime under the political situation at hand. I find this matter - i.e. what can be studied and what can be said in a precarious political situation – restrictive of academic freedom. I think academic freedom should not be subjugated to the pressures created by an oppressive political regime, and therefore in my own research want to provide the reader as an honest perspective of my thesis topic as possible, fully knowing the consequences. By doing this, I hope that my thesis will in its own limited way, contribute to the opening up of the academic research on Thai politics.

8. THEORY: GRAMSCI'S THEORY OF HEGEMONY AND THE NEO-GRAMSCIAN WORLD SYSTEM THEORY OF HISTORIC BLOCS

This chapter deals with the theoretical perspective applied in my thesis. I have combined the original Gramscian theory of hegemony and the Neo-Gramscian perspective of the Italian school as my theoretical framework, therefore this chapter is divided into two sub-chapters. Chapter 8 first involves a short introduction to Antonio Gramsci and the context in which he wrote his Prison Notebooks, after which his theory of hegemony and its basic concepts, as applied in my thesis, will be presented. The second part of this chapter handles the Neo-Gramscian world system approach of the Italian school, which is an updated version of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and how I intend to apply it in my thesis.

8.1. Gramsci's theory of hegemony and its central concepts

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian communist, a Member of the Italian Parliament, and the Chairman of the Italian Communist Party in 1924-26¹²². He was also an influential member of the Comintern, an international communist organization founded in Moscow 1919, whose aim was to create an international Soviet republic ruled by workers, and ultimately abolish of the state altogether¹²³. Gramsci wrote his "Prison Notebooks," which my

¹²² Gramsci 2007, xviii.

¹²³ *ibid*, xvii-xcvi. See the detailed account on Gramsci's political activism as the Chairman of the Italian Communist Party and his activism within Comintern.

thesis draws heavily upon, in prison in 1929-31. Gramsci was imprisoned in 1927, after the internal political developments in Italy had led to Mussolini fascist regime's rise to power, and Mussolini's crushing of the Italian Communist Party¹²⁴.

The central themes throughout Gramsci's fragmented texts are the concepts of hegemony and passive revolution, which both in Gramsci's analysis stem from the uneven development of capitalism. Through the concepts of hegemony and passive revolution, Gramsci analyses the uneven development of capitalism and the process of state formation at the periphery of the economic system, reflecting upon the various processes of diverse forms of state formation both on domestic and international levels¹²⁵.

Gramsci's focus of analysis is on the unification of the Italy of the Risorgimento era, and the uneven economic development between the industrialized urban North and the rural undeveloped South, and the socio-political implications of this relationship between the two regions. In his analysis, the industrialized North holds both the economic, political, and cultural-ideological dominance over the underdeveloped rural South. This territorial urban-rural relationship, as Gramsci characterizes it, is one of a dominance and hegemony of the economically developed urban North over the South, sealed in the strong state¹²⁶.

Although Gramsci's focus of analysis happens in the domestic level (=Italy), as a Marxist, he follows the logic of the internal mechanisms and logic of capitalism as laid out by Karl Marx, which are international by nature and do not follow the boundaries of a single nation state¹²⁷. As Gramsci proposes, the levels of the domestic and the international are inextricably linked; the phase of the economic state and the domestic relations of forces in the analysis have to be inserted into the context of the relation of forces on an international level in order to attain a clarity of analysis of a certain political situation¹²⁸. Gramsci writes:

"Any organic innovation in the social structure, through its technical-military expressions, modifies organically absolute and relative relations in the international field, too. Even the geographical position of a national State does not precede but follows (logically) structural

¹²⁴ Gramsci 2007, xvii-xcvi. See the previous footnote.

¹²⁵ Morton 2007, 1.

¹²⁶ Gramsci 2007, 70-71; 90-102.

¹²⁷ Marx-Engels 2010, 25-27. Gramsci 2007, 175-176.

¹²⁸ Gramsci 2007, 176.

changes, although it also reacts back upon them to a certain extent (to the extent precisely to which superstructures react upon the structure, politics on economics, etc.).”¹²⁹

The Gramscian perspective ties my own research in the Marxist research tradition of historical materialism in the field of international relations, as the focus of my analysis will be on the power and the power relations in society emanating from the economic power relations in society. The basic premises of this approach are that economics and politics are inseparable, and that economic change conditions social change¹³⁰. The basic underlying theoretical premise of the study is that there is the reciprocal relationship between power and production, which simplified in a very crude way here, means that those who own the means of production have the power in the politico-ideological and cultural levels in that particular society, respectively¹³¹.

Class analysis is central tool in the Gramscian analysis, as the social class relations emerge from the way the material base, the mode of production, is organised¹³². As for the role of the state, in this perspective the state has a dual function: on one hand, as it embodies the interest of the ruling class, it is the terrain of class struggle¹³³. On the other hand, the role of the state is to limit narrow class interests, as the state has tasks concerning the regulation of production¹³⁴.

The concept of hegemony initially comes from the Greek language, referring to an alliance of city-states under one dominant state called “hegemon”¹³⁵. Antonio Gramsci developed and problematized the concept further, in the context of his engagement in the theoretical political debates of the proletarian revolution strategy with Lenin and Trotsky in Russia during and after the Russian revolution in 1917¹³⁶.

For Gramsci, like for Marx, the economic base structure of the society - production relations - is the basis of social classes¹³⁷. However, Gramsci emphasized the significance of ideas as the

¹²⁹ Gramsci 2007, 176.

¹³⁰ *ibid.* 177.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 175-185.

¹³² See for instance Cox 1987, 6-8.

¹³³ Gramsci 2007, 181-182.

¹³⁴ Cox 1987, 19.

¹³⁵ Encyclopaedia of Marxism, Glossary of Terms.

¹³⁶ Adamson 1980, 81-100.

¹³⁷ Gramsci 2007, 12.

superstructure in society, too¹³⁸. Through his definition of hegemony, Gramsci focuses on the power and the power relations in the society. According to him, those who rule, have the power over the ruled throughout society not only over the means of production but they also rule and have power through the function of hegemony, based on the dialectics of coercion and consensus respectively, of ideas in a certain historical period¹³⁹. Thus, Gramsci brings the *politico-ideological dimension* into his conceptualizing of the function of hegemony. He states that the dominance of the ruling group involves both economic dominance, cultural-ideological dominance and political dominance, respectively, both on a national and on an international level¹⁴⁰.

In a society, hegemony derives from how certain ways of doing and thinking are accepted by the dominant strata of society. The dominant strata of a society then use the social practices and ideologies to explain and legitimize them as “a natural order of things.” In a world system, a hegemonic order is created when also the dominant strata of other states accept the social practices and ideologies of the dominant strata of the dominant state, and use the ideologies to legitimize them as “a natural order of things.” This ideological “natural order of things” involves an ideological understanding of the “stability” of the order.¹⁴¹ Agnew provides a simplified version of Cox’s analysis: hegemony means exercising dominance and power over others by manipulating, convincing, and/or coercing them that “*they want what you want*”¹⁴².

Through the function of hegemony, those who rule, have the power over the ruled throughout society not only over the means of production. They also rule and have power over the other spheres in society – the cultural, politico-ideological and social spheres - through the function of hegemony, based on the dialectics of coercion and consensus respectively, in society in a certain historical period¹⁴³. Thus, the dominance of the ruling group involves both economic dominance, cultural-ideological dominance and political dominance, respectively¹⁴⁴. Gramsci¹⁴⁵ uses the notion of the function of hegemony in a particular society together with the notion of the “passive revolution”; by this he means reformation of society without revolution – the hegemonic forces in society transform the society through their hegemonic

¹³⁸ Gramsci 2007, 12.

¹³⁹ Balaam-Veseth 2005, 55-60.

¹⁴⁰ Gramsci 2007, 12.

¹⁴¹ Cox 2000, 139-141.

¹⁴² Agnew 2005, 1-2.

¹⁴³ Balaam-Veseth 2005, 55-60.

¹⁴⁴ Gramsci 2007, 12.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, 106-110.

ways, not through abrupt changes, which would change the balance of the existing order. Again, Gramsci emphasizes the use of the notion of the passive revolution as an analytical tool.

The hegemonic relationship plants the seeds of social struggle and a struggle for hegemony between the different factions of the elites (the ruling classes) and the masses (the ruled)¹⁴⁶. Historical unity of the ruling classes is united in the state, and their history is essentially the history of states and groups of states¹⁴⁷. On the other hand, the history of the ruled (the subaltern) is fragmented and sporadic, as their struggle to change the system is constantly interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups¹⁴⁸. Thus, the eventual social change for the subaltern classes, takes a long time and a unified approach, until they in turn achieve hegemony in all spheres of society, both in the base structure and in the superstructure. This hegemonic structure then prevails until the internal flaws of the system render the system obsolete and a new hegemonic system emerges, usually – but not necessarily, through a violent revolution¹⁴⁹. However, the antagonistic tension of the classes is always latent in society. Gramsci uses the term “passive revolution” in analysing the process of the battle for hegemony, and as mentioned above, uses Machiavelli’s term “*war of position*” to analyse the latent tensions, and the political struggle between the different sections of society¹⁵⁰. This process is different in every society but the content is the same¹⁵¹.

The concept of hegemony refers thus to the duality of power: firstly, it involves the idea of power over but the reverse side of hegemony is the power to resist¹⁵². Counter-hegemony hence, refers to the possibility of challenging the prevailing hegemonic order; it is the struggle of social forces for alternative values against the hegemonic organizations and structures¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁶ Gramsci 2007, 52.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.* The fact that Gramsci never laid out neither a detailed, comprehensive notion of the civil society nor a comprehensive theory of the state in my opinion, does not diminish the value of his political theory, as his use of both concepts has contingency throughout his work.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 10-12. For comparison, see Volkogonov 1997, 198-199, and Trotsky’s view on this: Trotsky saw the revolution in the same way as Marx: the revolution was a liquidation of a class system and a move to communism. However, whereas Marx saw the proletarian revolution as an end in itself, Trotsky went further: he coined the term of the “permanent revolution”; the revolution would permeate the socialist undertakings and lead to a total annihilation and liquidation of a class society throughout the world.

¹⁵⁰ Gramsci 2007, 229-235.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, 210.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, 52-60.

¹⁵³ Slater 2003, 83.

At the heart of the changing of the hegemonic order are the counter-hegemonic forces, consisting of different factions of civil society¹⁵⁴.

When the configuration of the counter-hegemonic forces in a particular society is strong enough for them to make a conscious, concerted effort to challenge the hegemonic bloc's power, this conjecture is what Gramsci calls a war of position between the various social forces in that particular society¹⁵⁵. The war of position situation according to Gramsci emerges in a particular historical situation, which Gramsci calls an organic crisis of authority¹⁵⁶. The organic crisis of authority means that the hegemonic authority of the ruling classes and their politico-ideal rule is dissolving¹⁵⁷. In the organic crisis the authority of a state and the structures, with which the cohesion of the old system have been held together, has been challenged by the counterhegemonic oppositional social forces (the ruled), whose class consciousness is rising and combined with conscious will, is developing into a unified resistance of the old system¹⁵⁸. Gramsci calls this type of a historical situation "the war of position"; where the rulers hold the economic, military, and politico-ideological power in society and the ruled challenge it openly¹⁵⁹. The abstract concept "war of position," the subaltern challenging the rulers, involves the idea of unlimited potential for development, and it is primarily a criterion of interpretation¹⁶⁰.

This type of a situation can last for decades, as this type of a historical situation is influenced both by the domestic economic and politico-ideological processes, and by the international economic, military, and politico-ideological processes, as Gramsci proposes¹⁶¹. He further adds an important note to this type of a historical situation: in every country and different cultural context, the process is different; however, the inner laws of motion of the process are the same¹⁶².

¹⁵⁴ Gramsci 2007, 260-263.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, 234-239, 106-114.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*, 210.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, 366-369.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, 55-61.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, 210-214.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, 114.

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, 108-114.

¹⁶² *ibid*, 210.

8.2. The Neo-Gramscian Italian School and the theory of historic blocs

The Gramscian perspective, presented in the previous chapter, opens up a pathway to link another level of analysis in the study through the multidisciplinary world system theory of historic blocs as developed by Robert Cox¹⁶³ and Stephen Gill¹⁶⁴, whose world system approach relies heavily on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Marx, respectively. The world system approach, as defined by Cox, purports the hegemonic nature of respective historic blocs in the world system, where the economically strongest power has not only hegemony over economic structures but also its hegemonic power reaches out to the politico-ideological structures of the system¹⁶⁵. The historical hegemonic unit in the international system keeps its economic, military, political and social power position by both cajoling and coercion: it is by exercising force and through ideology, respectively¹⁶⁶.

The hegemonic processes on a domestic level and on an international level are intertwined, as the interests of the dominant class in a particular society are the same as the interests of the dominant class on a systemic level, and interests of the working class are the same both on the local level and on an international level¹⁶⁷. As Marx proposes, the logic of transnational economic capital is stronger than a power of a unitary singular state, and the inherent need for the spatial expansion of capital itself, reproduces the same antagonistic class struggles between the haves and the have-nots in any geophysical space in the world¹⁶⁸.

By extending the analysis to the level of world-system and the international economic structures, in my study I seek to relate the influence of the historical transformation and change processes in the world system to the historical economic, social, and political processes within Thai society, with the function of hegemony at the heart of the analysis.

Cox's definition of the concepts of hegemony and hegemonic order derives from Gramsci's ideas. Cox analyses hegemony in the framework of historic blocs in a world system: a historic bloc is a dominant structure consisting of a base structure – production relations and the social relationships defined by the production relations – and the superstructure (ideology and

¹⁶³ For Cox's central notions, see Cox 1981.

¹⁶⁴ See Gill 2008.

¹⁶⁵ See Cox 1981.

¹⁶⁶ Cox 1987, 105-109.

¹⁶⁷ Marx-Engels 2010, 24-26.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

political organization). The essential prerequisite for a historic bloc is the existence of a dominant social class.¹⁶⁹ In Gramsci's words, historical bloc refers to the following:

“...historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly, an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that gave strategic direction and coherence to its constituent elements.”¹⁷⁰

It is through this concept of a “historical bloc” that the holistic world system theory built upon the premises of the Frankfurt School critical theory, and the concepts of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci respectively, tries to understand the transformation and change in the global society. The emphasis of the world system theory is on the historical economic structures, which embody the basic tenets for understanding historical change.¹⁷¹

There is a duality of continuity and change inherent in the transformation of historic blocs; a new historic bloc emerges when counter-hegemonic forces are permeating all levels and structures of the old order and challenge it¹⁷². The world system is characterized by a hegemonic order, based on the power relationships created by the structure. Cox, like Gramsci, emphasizes the significance of the politico-ideological dimension of hegemony. To Cox, the prevalent historic world system is characterized by a hegemonic world order of states and non-state entities, where one state has economic or/and military dominance over the others. However, military/economic power is not enough. De facto, it is the consensual/coercive value structure (accepted social practices and ideologies) about the nature of a historic system, underpinned by a structure of power - where hegemony emerges.¹⁷³

John Agnew¹⁷⁴ proposes that the main phase of the process of the current global politics is the result of the particular hegemony project, which the United States has developed in the world since the Second World War. This hegemonic project has been implemented both by the United States government and through a wide variety of American institutions, which have the same structures and values of a free-market society that have emerged in the United States since the 19th century¹⁷⁵. In the heart of this global hegemonic project is the vision of a new

¹⁶⁹ Cox 1981, 131-132.

¹⁷⁰ Gill 2008, 60.

¹⁷¹ Overbeek 2003, 168-169.

¹⁷² Cox 1999, 131-132.

¹⁷³ *ibid*, 139-140.

¹⁷⁴ Agnew 2001, 134.

¹⁷⁵ Agnew 2005, 71-72.

world economic order, which Agnew calls transnational neoliberalism and the significance of the geopolitical role of the United States in promoting it¹⁷⁶.

Stephen Gill sees the current world system as a hegemonic order, a new economic world order; characterized by the American dominance through disciplinary neo-liberalism (Gill equates neo-liberalism with capitalism). He argues that disciplinary neoliberalism is a systematic program that has been created to create geopolitical and deep changes in structures of power, hegemony, and dominance that constitute the world order¹⁷⁷. Gill sees that the capitalist new economic world order has been implemented since the Second World War by the United States; however, since the collapse of communism, it is the spread of the capitalism and the intensified globalisation, and their ingrained ideological implications – disciplinary neoliberalism – that have strengthened the US hegemony in the world system¹⁷⁸.

I will use the world system analysis and the notion of hegemonic historic blocs on a world system level as a backdrop for the study, to highlight relevant historical situations for my study, and their significance to the transformation and change processes in Thai society. Hence, as I propose, two historic blocs proposed by Cox, have had a considerable influence on the capitalist development of Thailand: firstly, the historic hegemonic bloc of the so-called Pax Britannica, in which the maritime power Britain was the hegemonic power in the world system in the 19th century, and within which the pre-capitalist economic system of the old Siam was transformed into a modern capitalist nation-state. It was during this phase that the hegemonic rule of the different sections of the elites in Thailand began to evolve from the economic base through the formation of classes and through the formation of the division of labour¹⁷⁹.

The second significant historic bloc relevant to the consolidating of the hegemony of the elite networks in Thailand was the so-called Pax Americana after the WWII, when the United States emerged as the leading world power. Put into the Thai context, it was during the implementing of the neo-liberalist political program through the American economic and military expansion in South East Asia that the politico-ideological implications of the hegemony of the elites in Thailand were firmly consolidated, through the strengthening of the monarchy and the military.

¹⁷⁶ Agnew 2001, 133-135.

¹⁷⁷ Gill 2008, 67-68. Agnew (2001) and Carroll (2007) use the term transnational neoliberalism.

¹⁷⁸ Gill 2008, 67-69.

¹⁷⁹ Girling 1984.

The third historic bloc relevant to this study is what be what Cox initially called a post-hegemonic phase in the world system¹⁸⁰. Gill¹⁸¹ refers to it as oligopolistic neoliberalism, an era of the politics of supremacy, a prismatic transition period, a breaking of the structures of the hegemonic order of post-WWII disciplinary neoliberalism. Many international relations researchers have studied the era through the notion of globalization¹⁸²; however, in my opinion this is fetishizing an old phenomenon and limiting it into one temporal context only. Gills¹⁸³ suggests that the prismatic era and its challenges as a topic of research is best approached through critical reinvigorating of the whole field of international political economy, with its emancipatory possibilities in mind. However, what is central to my thesis when it comes to this transition period, is that due to new forms of communications and media and the complex globalized networks of social interaction, the capacity of national political leaders to sustain a singular national political culture is limited, and the notion of a singular political community within the boundaries of single nation-state has become impossible, indeed¹⁸⁴. The effective power is now fragmented between diverse political organizations, forces, and entities on the regional, national, and international levels¹⁸⁵.

According to Gill¹⁸⁶, one manifestation of this new intense integration in the world system is multilateralism, and the crises that happen on a regional level of the system. These crises can have deep economic, social, and political impact in that particular context. An example of these crises is the Southeast Asian economic crisis of 1997-98, which had particular impact on Thai society on all the mentioned levels. Here, going back to my own research, I see that the Southeast Asian economic crisis ultimately prompted a completely new phase in Thai politics: the breaking down process of the old hegemonic rule of the elites, and the emergence of the masses as a counter-hegemonic unified class-conscious political force.

¹⁸⁰ See Cox 2000.

¹⁸¹ Gill 1995, 422-423.

¹⁸² *ibid*, 405.

¹⁸³ Gills 2001.

¹⁸⁴ Held 1998, 19-21.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*.

¹⁸⁶ Gill 2008.

9. CREATING HEGEMONY: PAX BRITANNICA AND THE INTRODUCTION OF CAPITALISM IN THAILAND

9.1. The pre-capitalist mode of production in Siam: The Sakdina system

Thailand was transformed into a capitalist nation-state in the late 19th century¹⁸⁷. Until then, the geographical area known as Thailand today, “the Siamese Empire,” was a loose, diverse cosmopolitan alliance, comprised of administrative and trade centres located along trade routes. The “Siamese Empire” had no clear borders. It was administered by local ruling families, even though Siam’s locus of power and the administrative centre was transferred to Bangkok from the old Siamese capital of Ayutthaya at the end of the 18th century. The geographical area that the Siamese Empire covered at the end of the 18th century was approximately the geographical area of current Thailand plus parts of the present Laos and Cambodia.¹⁸⁸

The dominant economic and social system in the pre-capitalist Siam was what in Thai is called the “Sakdina¹⁸⁹” system, a system based on the power to mobilize labor¹⁹⁰. The economy was based on rice production, the person who owned the land owned the people and their labour¹⁹¹. In the Sakdina system, the surplus production¹⁹² and its control beyond the labourers’ subsistence level lay on forced labour and the extraction of taxes¹⁹³. This system was possible because of the population structure: Siam was relatively sparsely populated in those days¹⁹⁴.

In its essence, the Sakdina system means the dominance of the king, his family and the state over peasantry; the relationship was one of a control of labour, as Ungpakorn¹⁹⁵ says “direct

¹⁸⁷ Girling 1984.

¹⁸⁸ Wyatt 1984, 139-161.

¹⁸⁹ “Sakdina” is often interpreted to derive from the words “Shakti” (power) and “Naa” (rice field). Heikkilä-Horn – Miettinen 2000, 120. Translation from the Finnish original text Heli Kontio.

¹⁹⁰ Ungpakorn 2010, 120.

¹⁹¹ Phumisak 2000: 6-25. Phumisak sees the Sakdina system as an all-engulfing social system, including economy, politics, and culture.

¹⁹² The quantitative “surplus product”: what is produced beyond the necessary subsistence level in society. In pre-capitalist society, like the Sakdina system: the surplus product refers to a tax, a rent, or a tribute to the landowner or the feudal lord, for instance. See Marx 2010 (1867): Parts III-IV on “Surplus,” Part VIII, Ch.26-30 on “Primitive accumulation” in pre-capitalist societies in “Capital.”

¹⁹³ Ungpakorn 2010, 119-120.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

control of humans,” i.e. the ruler’s ability to mobilize labour when necessary. Bowie¹⁹⁶ proposes that the majority of the population were slaves, and continues emphasizing the majority of the slaves having been “war slaves,” slaves captured in wars. The English term ‘slave’, let it be mentioned here, is slightly inaccurate, as the Thai language terms for ‘slave’ are ‘tat’ and ‘prai’, which both first and foremost refer to the social position in the hierarchy of Thai society, and only secondly, to the bond relationship between the ruler and the subordinate and to the ruler’s ability to mobilize labour when necessary; hence, ‘tat’ = born to a labour class family; ‘prai’= commoner¹⁹⁷.

This relationship between the ‘tat’ and ‘prai’ bonded labour and the ruler involved a hierarchy of relationships under the umbrella term “patron-client” relationship between individuals of different status, which revolved around reciprocal exchange of production, protection, services, and security¹⁹⁸. The economy was based on agriculture, thriving trade, and war; however, the importance of war lay more on gaining ‘tat’ and ‘prai’ than on the conquest of territory¹⁹⁹.

The class structure of the Sakdina system consisted of three classes: the ‘tat’ and the ‘prai’; the ruling class, and a diverse group of less well-structured classes, which consisted for instance of the Chinese intermediaries in charge of commodity sales²⁰⁰. The king was on top of the hierarchy, as he controlled the trade and the land²⁰¹. The practical application of the Buddhist religion consolidated the hegemonic ideology of the King owning the land and the people into a hierarchical social system with limited social mobility²⁰².

The complex interdependent hierarchical, reciprocal relationship based on exchange of production, security, and protection between the rulers – the local kings, nobles and local rulers – and the ruled ‘tat’ and ‘prai’, was an all-inclusive system regulating social relations in the Sakdina system. Due to the intertwined logic of the system and the population structure, the economic and administrative power was not centralized under the ultimate power centre of Bangkok before the introduction of the modern capitalism to Siam.

¹⁹⁶ Bowie 2006, 7. Bowie estimates that up to 75% of the population of the area of the Northern Kingdom of Lanna (now, Chiang Mai) were slaves.

¹⁹⁷ Translation Heli Kontio. The Red Shirt Movement adopted the use of the word ‘prai’ in their street protests in 2010, and have used the term ever since to identify their commoner origins, as opposed to the ‘ammart’, the hegemonic elite networks.

¹⁹⁸ Tanabe 1984, 87. The theoretical dimensions of the Sakdina system are still heavily debated.

¹⁹⁹ Ungpakorn 2010, 120.

²⁰⁰ Elliott 1978, 21.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

²⁰² *ibid.*

9.2. Transition into modern capitalism: uneven development, the new division of labour and the centralized nation-state

Thailand's transformation into a modern capitalist state concurred with the aggressive expansion of the world market to the region by the European imperial powers. China, Siam's old trade companion, lost the Opium War to the British in 1842, and Britain occupied Hong Kong, gaining a huge trade advantage in the region, after colonizing India. By the end of the 19th century, the British also ruled Malaya and Burma, and France had extended their Indochina Empire to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia²⁰³. Gramsci explains European powers' colonialist expansion in Marx's terms:

“Though Europe was rich in resources, it had arrived at the point at which the rate of profit was beginning to reveal its tendency to fall; Europe had a need to widen the area of expansion of its income-bearing investments.”²⁰⁴

In the midst of the external pressures of expansionist colonialism and internal pressures of restructuring its own society, Siam's transformation into a capitalist nation-state began. The Bowring treaty, the free trade agreement between the British and Siam, signed in 1855, was the final trajectory into capitalism for Siam²⁰⁵. In the following years, between 1855 and 1870, Siam's rulers signed several similar free trade treaties with major Western powers; however, the impact of the Bowring treaty and the British was the most far-fetching one²⁰⁶. The Bowring treaty guaranteed equal dues to both Chinese and Western shipping, it marked an end to the royal monopolies in trade, and it granted extraterritorial rights to British citizens²⁰⁷. What it meant in practice, was that even though Siam was not directly a British colony, its status was practically that of a colonized state.

This new wave of capitalism as the dominant social institution involved profound socio-economic transformations, including a new division of labour and the centralization of political power under a unified, monolithic nation-state with the absolute monarch as the head of state in Bangkok²⁰⁸.

²⁰³ Heikkilä-Horn –Miettinen 2000, 198. Translation: Heli Kontio. See also Wyatt 1984, 202-204.

²⁰⁴ Gramsci 2007, 68.

²⁰⁵ Ungpakorn 2010, 121.

²⁰⁶ Dixon 1999, 30.

²⁰⁷ Baker-Phongpaichit 2005, 45.

²⁰⁸ *ibid*, 53-61.

The transformation to capitalism in Siam, unlike in England and France, was led “from above” by the Chakri dynasty ruler King Chulalongkorn (Rama V)²⁰⁹.

First, Chulalongkorn centralized the political power in the hands of the ruling elites in Bangkok by reforming the administrative structure of the cosmopolitan kingdom of Siam, which he modelled after the British colonies. His aim was to create a monolithic unified nation-state adapted from the nationalistic Western ideals of the colonial powers. Chulalongkorn created the Siamese state partly to buffer off the threat of direct colonization of Siam; partly to realize his own ambitions: to control –and colonize– the peripheral regions of Siam under his own rule, in order to adjust Siam better to the demands of the new market economy.²¹⁰

Chulalongkorn did this by creating a civil servant bureaucracy to rule the peripheral regions of Siam. The creation of the bureaucracy meant abolition of the pre-capitalist Sakdina system; the bureaucratic rulers were directly under the Bangkok-based King’s rule, which rendered the local Sakdina rulers powerless. Chulalongkorn also abolished their power to control forced labour; he abolished slavery; and introduced the concept of private land property rights to Siam. Forced labour was replaced by wage labour. Chulalongkorn invested heavily in production of agriculture “to modernize” Siam to adjust his country to be competitive in the market economy. This all opened up possibilities for the peasant class for work and settling down to new regions. The stimulated growth of economy in due course caused a wage labour shortage, which was easy to deal with by transmigrating wage labour to Thailand from China.²¹¹

It is in this transformation of Siam into a modern capitalist state, in which I see the fundamentals of the current political crisis stemming from initially. On one hand, there is the coercive element from outside colonialism. On the other hand, there is the internal struggle between the peasants and the property owners, which was temporarily pacified by the forced social contract between the Bangkok-based absolute monarch and the masses against the local rulers, which masked the coercive hegemonic domestic element: the internal colonization through creating a centralized nation-state. These processes are intertwined and organic and they have changed and transformed themselves over time, naturally. However, it is in this

²⁰⁹ Baker-Phongpaichit 2005, 53-61.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ Wyatt 1984, 181-210; Ungpakorn 2010, 120-124.

conjuncture point in Thailand's historic development that I see the seeds of the current Thai political crisis and the underlying violence of the Thai political system were initially sown.

Capitalism, according to Karl Marx is an historic organization of society ruled by the profit motive, it is, the production of goods and services for the sake of profit, not to satisfy people's needs only²¹². Capital is a highly abstract concept; money is only one aspect of capital; capital is also situated in the social relations²¹³.

What is important is that in capitalism, the insertion of capital into production process realizes more capital accumulation. Two prerequisites for this process are a sufficient amount of labourers available for a capitalist to extract a surplus value from their labour, and a sphere of the existence of market forces, which involves the expansion of capital through accumulation, and puts to motion the competition between different groups of capital.²¹⁴

The differentiation of degree between the various groups within the capitalist class – their titles, for example, are not important; what matters is that they control the material means of production, as well as accumulation²¹⁵. In Siam, the development of the capitalist class was the different from Europe – during the decades that the capitalist mode of production and the structures emanating from it, the capitalist class consisted of the absolute monarch and his subordinates, i.e. the bureaucrats²¹⁶. On the other hand, there were the indigenous Chinese merchants, and the foreign capitalists, who were mainly Westerners and Japanese²¹⁷.

The implementation of the process of the capitalist mode of production in Thailand was not much different from the other countries of the region. It certainly differed from the developments in Europe, where transition from feudalism to capitalism in England for instance happened through emancipation of the peasantry and citizen capitalism²¹⁸. However different the cultural and historical context, Marx' theory of capitalism is in my opinion fully applicable in the Thai context, as it is based on abstracting the concepts of labour and capital. By this, I refer specifically to the 19th century transition phase to a capitalist mode of production in Thailand.

²¹² Harman 2010, 21-29.

²¹³ See for instance Marx 2006 [1847].

²¹⁴ Ungpakorn 2010, 124.

²¹⁵ Katz 1993, 355.

²¹⁶ Keyes 1987, 44-56.

²¹⁷ Baker – Phongpaichit 2005, 89-93.

²¹⁸ Katz 1993, 377.

By the 1930s, the capitalist economic organization of society was fully integrated into Thai society. The change compared to the old Sakdina system, had been profound, and it permeated both the processes of the base structure and the superstructure of social relations. The base structure processes of society had been revolutionized by the royally induced revolution, and the Sakdina system had been abolished, through creating a unified Thai state with a geo-body with boundaries.

Thinking of the current Thai political crisis, the basis of the antagonisms and struggle between the classes were laid out by the economic reforms of the Chulalongkorn era. However, it is also the hegemonic processes in the realm of the superstructure that need to be refocused onto, in order to be able to understand the long-term influence of this historical phase of Thailand to the current crisis.

Again, the international level and the domestic level are intertwined, and cannot be separated from each other. I would propose that on the level of superstructure, the reforms of the Chulalongkorn era that still have effect today, are first, the modelling of the Thai state into a monolithic whole after the nationalistic state model adopted from the West. Masked under the concept of “Siwilai”²¹⁹, which included building a geo-body of a unified entity coded under the administrative umbrella term of the nation-state of “Siam,” there was also a new cosmology introduced, hitherto unknown in the imagination of the Siamese²²⁰.

In my opinion, the significance of the new cosmology lay in the fact that the new cosmology not only spatially arranged geographical state, as obtained from the West and adapted to the Thai historical situation. The ideological dimension of the new cosmology, in the superstructure of Thai society also remodelled power relations, both inside the capitalist class, and the relations between the ruling class and the peasantry in the domestic sphere. The creation of the strong Thai state served to mediate between the capitalist ruling elites and the masses. The strong administrative bureaucracy, whose ideologies were diverse, was strongly manipulated and influenced by the Bangkok ruling elites; it is the absolute monarch and his network. Both aspects lay the basis for the strong co-operation between the monarchy and

²¹⁹ See Winichakul 2000, 539. “Siwilai” is a word introduced to Thai language from the English language during the transformation of Siam into a capitalist state, means simply “civilization”; but it included also the ideas of European power, the material and technological advances, culture and law. The Siamese king has cosmic power, and he was a semi-God on top of the Buddhist social system. However, the invading Europeans colonized the Southeast Asian region with their power of Siwilai, so the Europeans must have a different cosmic power. The concept of Siwilai adapted to the Thai context meant the fusion of the two different cosmic powers to make Siam stronger.

²²⁰ *ibid.*

other sections of the ruling elites in Thailand as co-operating members of a networked capitalist class.

The causal connection of this historical era to the later historical developments lies in the process of creating a strong bureaucracy and the emergence of the strong military to support the bureaucratic rule, as laid out by Bangkok. The strong bureaucratic practices as part of the hegemonic superstructure have been a fundamental coercive/consensual element of the Thai politics ever since Thailand was transformed into a capitalist state, and they have been reproduced over and over again to uphold the power of the Bangkok elites. This axis between the bureaucracy and military has been so strong in Thai politics, that it has become almost an essentialist model of Thai politics in the academic research²²¹.

9.3. The 1932 Revolution and the abolition of the absolute monarchy

By the beginning of the 1930s, the Thai economy was fully integrated in the world market. The base of its economy was specialized agriculture, the most important export produce being rice. The growth of rice exports was the biggest economic change between the years 1850-1950. During this period, 80-90 per cent of the population was involved in rice farming, and the rice exports comprised 60-70 per cent of total exports.²²²

Most of the expansion of the rice cultivation was done by the indigenous Thai²²³. The modernizing of the economy, the market sector –building the infrastructure necessary for rice exports, i.e. the irrigation systems and logistical infrastructures- was done by importing wage labour en masse from rural South China. It is estimated that by 1910, the amount of Chinese immigrants had risen from 5% of the population to 10%²²⁴.

The commercialization of the wage labour also reached the bulk of the indigenous population in the form of using hired hands in the highly specialized agricultural sector²²⁵.

²²¹ See Riggs' classic work (1966) "Thailand. The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity".

²²² Ingram 1971, 36-45.

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ Wyatt 1984, 217-219.

²²⁵ Ingram 1971, 57.

The 1930s global economic depression hit Thailand hard. The 1920s had been tumultuous for the economy, and crises followed another. The world market rice price fluctuations were a challenge to the government. Spending on military and monarchical costs increased to swallow a disproportionate portion of the national budget. In the years 1930-32, the world market rice price fell by 75%, and the value of land fell down to a sixth of what it had been in the previous years.²²⁶

High unemployment rate, salary cuts and tax raises plus the social and political unrest ultimately laid the basis for the 1932 revolution, and to the abolition of the Thai absolute monarchy²²⁷. The revolution and the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932 mark the beginning of the modern Thailand in the canonized meta-narrative of writing Thai history.

The revolution of 1932 was carried out in the midst of societal unrest, which was due to the downturn of the economy affected by fluctuations in the world economy. A group of Western- educated young intellectuals together with military officers known collectively as “Promoters”, who had a wide distrust in monarchy between themselves, performed a coup, created a temporary constitution and abolished absolute monarchy²²⁸. The general recuperative economic plan for after the revolution was to be carried out under the new constitution by the Promoters’ “People’s Party”²²⁹, with Pridi Panomyong as main architect of the plan²³⁰.

The canonized meta-narrative of Thai history and the bulk of both the Western and Thai research in the field of international relations both like to sum up the changes that occurred in Thai society after the 1932 revolution under the accumulative consolidation of democracy, emphasizing the functional-structural or institutional dimension of democracy²³¹.

I, on the other hand, prefer to follow Ungpakorn’s view on the significance of the 1932 revolution when it comes to its effects on the current political crisis. Ungpakorn proposes that the real significance of the 1932 revolution lies in the changes in the superstructure of society: the revolution expanded the base of the ruling stratum of society, on the other hand, to include the military, and on the other hand, diminishing of the monarchy into just one fraction of the ruling class. Furthermore, he sees the relative weakness of both the domestic capitalist class

²²⁶ Wyatt 1984, 229-240.

²²⁷ Ungpakorn 2010, 125.

²²⁸ Ferrara 2012, 11. Ungpakorn 2010, 125.

²²⁹ In Thai = Khana ratsadon. H Kontio.

²³⁰ Heikkilä-Horn – Miettinen 2000, 203-205. Translation H Kontio.

²³¹ Ferrara 2012, 5.

and the working class, respectively, as the main reason for the growing influence of the military in the public realm of politics.²³²

Wyatt could be interpreted to have a similar conclusion on the significance of the military on the later developments in Thai society, as Ungpakorn, though from a different perspective altogether. Wyatt refers to the repetitive role of the military as a dominant force in Thai politics ever since 1932, both in the forefront and behind the scenes of politics. Wyatt proposes that the rise of the military was due to the sudden absence of monarchy in society. He suggests that the rise of the military happened because military had a high prestige as a social institution in Thai society as a social institution; it was a hierarchical organization, modelled and reproduced after the conservative and socially cohesive cosmology of the old Sakdina system.²³³

I am trying to combine these two viewpoints through theory, in order to point out the reason why the nexus of hegemonic power in the superstructure of the process of social change at this historical conjectural point was shifted to military – and why the influence of the military is still very strong, whenever there is a political crisis in Thailand.

Here we might go back to Gramsci again and look at his conceptualization of an organic crisis of authority in a society. What is noteworthy here when outlining an organic crisis of authority is the temporal dimension: the tenure of an organic crisis of authority in a society can extend over a long period²³⁴. This situation happens when structural contradictions that cannot be resolved in traditional ways evolve in a social formation; in this situation the dominant political forces do everything to conserve the old order through persistent efforts, even though the social formation in question has reached its maturity and its structure is incurable²³⁵.

Gramsci, who never created a theory of the state per se, uses Italy during the time of the unification of Italy (the Risorgimento), which culminated in 1860-61, as an analytical tool and an example of an organic crisis of hegemonic authority. He outlines the role of a non-productive entity, like the military or the bureaucracy, in a moment of crisis.

²³² Ungpakorn 2010, 125-126.

²³³ Wyatt 1984, 243-252.

²³⁴ Gramsci 2007, 178.

²³⁵ *ibid*, 175-178.

He analyses the Italy of the Risorgimento movement era as an example of an organic crisis of the State and the crisis of hegemony between the ruling classes and the masses²³⁶. Gramsci analyses the domestic development of the Italy of the Risorgimento, never forgetting the temporal and the spatial context against which the unification of Italy was carried out; i.e. the economic and political developments in other countries of Europe. He says:

“These variations in the actual process whereby the same historical development manifests itself in different countries have to be related not only to the differing combinations of international relations (international relations are usually underestimated in this kind of research). The Jacobin²³⁷ spirit, audacious, dauntless, is certainly related to the hegemony exercised for so long by France in Europe, as well as to the existence of an urban centre like Paris and to the centralisation attained in France thanks to the absolute monarchy. The Napoleonic wars on the other hand, intellectually so fertile for the renovation of Europe, nonetheless through their enormous destruction of manpower- and these were men taken from among the boldest and most enterprising –weakened not only by the militant political energy of France but that of other nations as well.”²³⁸

In the Italy of Risorgimento phase and during the later developments in Italy the military played a large role in establishing hegemony of the ruling classes²³⁹. Especially the unifying of Italy during the Risorgimento period 1870-1900 could be proposed to resemble the Siamese process of establishing and consolidating the hegemonic rule of Bangkok elites. What is noteworthy here when outlining an organic crisis of authority is the temporal dimension: the tenure of an organic crisis of authority in a society can extend over a long period, up to decades²⁴⁰.

In Italy there was a deep divide between the industrialised North and the underdeveloped South – a territorial version of the urban-rural divide, as Gramsci points out, based on dominance and hegemony of the economically developed urban North, sealed in the strong state²⁴¹. As in Italy, also in Siam, the urban and the rural areas were bound together only by the directive function exercised by the dominant economic centre²⁴². This relationship between the rural and the urban areas was naturally a complex one with different combination

²³⁶ Gramsci writes at length about the Italian Risorgimento, the movement to unify Italy under a monolithic state at the end of the 19th century, see Gramsci 2007, 69-124 for his detailed analysis. Gramsci's framework has been used extensively in the Neo-Marxian interpretation of the modern state formation and the strategies of consolidating the hegemony of the ruling class; see the case of Mexico in Morton 2010.

²³⁷ The concept of Jacobinism for Gramsci means a force that unifies the peasants under the hegemony of proletariat, i.e. that the great mass of peasants attain a certain level of historic-political culture so that they burst simultaneously into the sphere of political life. See Gramsci 2007, 123.

²³⁸ Gramsci 2007, 85-86.

²³⁹ *ibid*, 210-223.

²⁴⁰ *ibid*, 178.

²⁴¹ *ibid*, 70-71.

²⁴² *ibid*, 89.

of relationships within and between the two entities. However, the relationship can be characterized as a relationship of direct dominance between the ruler and the subordinate, in which the real, the organic unification of the countryside and the urban areas is missing²⁴³.

Gramsci's conceptual analysis above is well applicable to the post-1932 era rise of the military in Thailand. The transnational crisis of the capitalist system processes, as they appeared in their historical conjuncture point in 1932, had affected Thai domestic economic and societal processes deeply. Regarding the base structure, the organizational form of production and the division of labour that the economy was restructured into after King Chulalongkorn's revolution from above, had been solidified so that by the 1932 crisis Thailand was fully integrated into the world market, as already mentioned. Capitalism had been solidified as the dominant form of economic organization at this very point of historical development, up to the point where the historical unity of the ruling classes was realized in the monolithic Thai state in the group –or international society – of states²⁴⁴.

As in Italy, the capitalist class in Thailand was weak and heterogeneous when the revolution of 1932 was carried out. The abolition of the absolute monarchy had led into monarchy being transformed from a prominent hegemonic societal institution into just another part of the governing elites of Bangkok. The economy was in chaos. The sphere of politics was open for violent solution, however, that did not happen in Thailand. Instead, the military rose in influence, as already mentioned earlier.

According to Gramsci, in this type of organic crisis, “a crisis of authority”, “a general crisis of the state”; at this conjuncture the content of the crisis is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony. This type of a crisis occurs when the ruling class has failed in some of its undertakings to ensure its hegemony or/and at the same the masses have become politically active with their demands. In this situation, the ruling classes retort to trying to regain the control by coercion in order to safeguard its interests – and power - both in the spheres of the processes of production and in the sphere of the superstructure (the ideological level).²⁴⁵

This situation occurs in historical saddle points, when the old system is breaking down and the new system is to come to existence²⁴⁶. The situation slides into a stagnant type of a status

²⁴³ Gramsci calls this the Jacobin spirit, a collective will to bring the peasants and the working class into political life. See Gramsci 2007, 123-124, 130-132.

²⁴⁴ Gramsci 2007, 52: As conceptualized by Gramsci: History of the subaltern classes, methodological criteria.

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, 206-210.

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 276.

quo, the war of position, as the masses have detached themselves from the old ideologies but do not yet have a political program and the organization needed to act upon their demands against the old order²⁴⁷. In this interregnum period, the content of the crisis is universal, though the process differs from country to country²⁴⁸.

If in a country, there is a social stratum who has a monopoly or whose economic or political self-expression is strongly attached to military or bureaucratic career, depending on the particular nature of that society, this military or bureaucratic class, who in themselves do not have an economic function in society, may become a strong social force²⁴⁹. By nature, this class is reactionary in the sense that its social position depends directly on the ruling class²⁵⁰. Gramsci emphasizes, however, the directive nature of the military or the bureaucratic class – he sees that the power of this class is not necessarily absolute, as its power depends on the ruling class of the economic apparatus²⁵¹. However, when it comes to power, the strong military reinforces the already existing division of power between the urban and the rural area, which in this type of a phase of the capitalist economic mode of production is an inbuilt law of motion; having the power in the urban area means having the power in the rural area.²⁵²

In this type of a situation, the military influence in a society is not just influence in the technical sense of the word but also implies the influence of the social stratum where the military emerges from – and the psychological tendencies and the energy of this social stratum, which more often than not is conservative. This stratum more often than not expresses its aims in “political language” rather than in “economic” language. According to Gramsci, this happened in the Italy during the Risorgimento era. Gramsci also cites Spain as one example of this type of a process: the countryside is sparsely populated and the rural population is separated from the centre of power and politically not active; there is no rural bourgeoisie; hence, the military influence in the society is strong.²⁵³

In the case of an organic crisis of authority then, the military influence in society is strong, and there is always a possibility of the crisis being resolved through the military taking

²⁴⁷ Gramsci 2007, 210-215.

²⁴⁸ *ibid*, 210.

²⁴⁹ *ibid*, 211-213.

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, 214.

²⁵¹ *ibid*.

²⁵² *ibid*, 213.

²⁵³ *ibid*, 215.

over²⁵⁴. However, as mentioned earlier: the military is never a united entity, supporting one uniform ideology, as they have none - except for preserving the interests of those their existence depends on, it is the ruling classes. Hence, if there is a tendency to political disagreement, it tends to happen vertically inside the ranks of the military through rival cliques and personal grievances rather than along any ideological frontiers²⁵⁵. In this type of a situation, the military is a permanent political force, ready to react and intervene in the public domain whenever there is a chance of an organic crisis of authority, and whenever there is a perceived threat to the perceived “legal order,” or in other words, a perceived threat to hegemony²⁵⁶.

Gramsci mentions Spain and Greece as examples of this tendency²⁵⁷. He also cites India and China as examples of countries in which there is a large “parasitic” class (=military and bureaucracy) who has no position in production, but whose influence of as a political force is strong, leading to historical stagnation of these countries²⁵⁸. I would add Siam to the group. Consequently, herein is the key as to why the historical conjuncture of the Siamese 1932 revolution intensified the influence of the military instead of reducing it.

Inside Siam, the rise of the bureaucratic class had everything to do with building a Western type of a nationalist, monolithic, territorial state of Siam, centralized under the administrative centre of Bangkok. It was with the assistance of the bureaucracy that the hegemony of the ruling classes was established throughout the Siamese territory, in the first place²⁵⁹. The military’s role became to enhance the bureaucracy’s role, and legitimize enforcing the modern state of Siam with a geo-body during the reign of the King Vajiravudh, whom King Chulalongkorn appointed as the King in 1895²⁶⁰.

In addition, the late dynastic modernisation and the late division of labour played a role in strengthening a role of the military²⁶¹. Siam was heavily dependent solely on rice production in its economy for decades, and international fluctuations on the world market prices of rice reflected immediately on the national economy²⁶². The late dynastic modernisation and

²⁵⁴ Gramsci 2007, 215.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 211-215.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 215.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 285.

²⁵⁹ Girling 1984, 386-387.

²⁶⁰ Wyatt 1984, 224-230

²⁶¹ Girling 1984, 386-387.

²⁶² Keyes 1987, 152.

widespread social discontent led to the abolition of monarchy in the 1932 revolution, rendering monarchy to just one political force among others²⁶³.

Before the 1932 revolution, the military's role grew further during King Prajadhipok's reign in the 1920s, as the international pressure on Siam was not only via the colonial Western powers. The rise of Japanese imperialism and the rise of the communism in China, plus the regional anti-colonial struggle had their effects on the Siamese soil and on the rise of the military in Siam. In late 1920s, Siam was a base for Lao, Vietnamese, Burmese and Cambodian nationalists to wage struggle against the colonial powers in their respective countries. In addition, Siam was a base for its Chinese population's anti-Japanese struggle and the Communist vs. Kuomintang struggles amongst the Chinese.²⁶⁴

9.4. Solidifying the hegemonic rule: bureaucracy, military and the local elites

In this chapter, I return to the processes of the superstructure of the social change in Siam during the period when Siam was transformed into a modern capitalist state. The temporal context of this chapter covers loosely the same period as the previous chapter, the period between the years 1850-1932. The temporal dimension is only of secondary importance here, as the hegemonic rule of the trinity of the bureaucracy, the military, and the elites has continued until the South East Asian economic crisis in 1997-98 and the ensuing Thai Rak Thai Party-led era.

In the previous chapter, I have tried to outline the changes in the base structure, i.e. the material base, and to some extent tried to identify the underlying fundamental dynamics of the societal change in Thailand, and the dynamics of the relationships between the different social forces during 1850-1932. I have done this with keeping in mind the current Thai political crisis, as well as the starting point of my research, i.e. that the underlying fundamentals of the current crisis are ultimately to be found in the historical development of the Thai society under the dominant economic mode of societal organization of capitalism. I have also tried to point out how the logics of the international dimension of the Thai societal change are inextricably intertwined with the logics of the domestic processes.

²⁶³ Ungpakorn 2010, 125.

²⁶⁴ Wyatt 1984, 237-238.

In order to complete the perspective of the process of historical change in a society, it is also essential to understand the process and the underlying dynamics of the change of ideas and ideologies that are intertwined with the material change during that particular phase in that particular society, in this case Thailand.

Herein, it is apt to bring in the ideological-political dimension of hegemony by Gramsci. As I have proposed earlier, the hegemony of one class in society does not cover only the control of the economy but it also permeates cultural, political, and educational realms of society²⁶⁵. Gramsci saw economics, politics and ideas as an intertwined whole, bound in a historical bloc. According to Cox²⁶⁶, when it comes to understanding ideas that are relevant to a historical material structure = ideas as collective images of certain social order, as imagined by different groups of people, there is a normative principle inherent in this understanding of ideas. By this Cox means, that there are conflicting views on the nature and legitimacy of power relations, the meaning of certain concepts like democracy, good governance, social justice, etc., between the different groups in society. Consequently, there are different views on the strategies and on the potential for the evolving of an alternative economic material structure as the mode of organizing the mode of production in a society²⁶⁷.

Gramsci²⁶⁸ saw the ideological dimension of these conflicting ideas embodied in the function of hegemony in a society in a given historical time. According to Gramsci, the social group who dominates the ownership of the means of production tries to preserve the power relations in all realms of the society through coercion and consensus, respectively: in the realm of ideas and ideologies, to legitimize its rule and to stabilize and preserve a particular order²⁶⁹.

The hegemonic control of the ruling classes over the masses is solidified – and their rule legitimized - directly through coercion in the public sphere via the government, legislation and other institutionalized forms of control. The consensual dimension of hegemony is more subtle, as it is not based on direct, but on an indirect control over the subordinate classes, instead. The consensual control over the masses is solidified in the private realm of a society, via the everyday social practices, where the masses give consensual control to the rulers. Here the central notion is that it is the historically caused position of ruling classes in the production that is seen as a natural, prestigious source of power as such. Both the coercive

²⁶⁵ Gill 2008, 68.

²⁶⁶ Cox 1999, 98-99.

²⁶⁷ *ibid*, 99.

²⁶⁸ Gramsci 2007, 12.

²⁶⁹ Gill 2008, 14; 67.

and the consensual dimension of hegemony are understood as organisational and mutually intertwined.²⁷⁰

The function of the social hegemony and domination creates a certain type of a division of labour in a society. Consequently, hegemony creates an open group of hierarchical qualifications to arrange a society upon, qualifications, which bear no direct relation to the mode of production. In practise, this means that there will be a differentiated group of jobs created through hegemony, whose function is “parasitic” – they exist only to serve and preserve the ruling classes’ inherited or/and dominant position in a society.²⁷¹

This in turn, reinforces the function of the hegemonic social order and reinforces the “legitimacy” of the power of the ruling classes in a society in the long term, until the dominant order is seen as “natural process of things”²⁷². The process of the function of hegemonic control creates solidarity and psychological bonds between different hegemonic groups over time, and it reaches over all domains of economic and productive activity²⁷³.

When looking at the implementing of the hegemonic rule in a society, if we try to pinpoint the locus where the power relations in society are most obvious, and the locus from where the antagonisms in a society and seeds of social struggle and discontent stem from, Scott²⁷⁴ locates this nexus first and foremost in the public realm of hegemonic control, where the power of the rulers over the subordinate is displayed, and given an expression through institutionalized social practices and hegemonic discourses.

In the early 20th century Siam, the control of the economic base of the society by the Bangkok elites was already solidified through the imposing of the capitalist mode of production. The division of labour that followed shortly after in the process of adopting the capitalist mode of production in many European countries, evolved also in Siam, through a different process. However, the social differentiation process happened slowly in Siam. Hence, the development of the petty bourgeoisie was a much slower process in Siam, and there developed no middle class, neither was there a smallholding domestic capitalist class to speak of.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁰ Gill 2008, 12.

²⁷¹ *ibid*, 13.

²⁷² *ibid*, 52-53.

²⁷³ *ibid*, 60.

²⁷⁴ Scott 1990, x-xiii.

²⁷⁵ Girling 1984, 389.

If we place Gramsci's theory on the function of hegemony in the Thai context at hand, we could conclude, first of all, that in this country-specific process of the elites' gaining control of the Thai society, a space opened up for the two key subsections of the ruling elites to evolve: the bureaucracy and the military. These two subsections have played a key part in Thai political life since the early 20th century, up until now. De facto, the position of these two subsections of the Bangkok elites depended entirely on the owners of the means of production, as they themselves did not have any function as such in the economic production. Their only function was to enforce the centralization practices of the administrative rule of Bangkok inside Siam after King Chulalongkorn's capitalist revolution from above.²⁷⁶

10. PAX AMERICANA, LEGITIMIZING THE MILITARY RULE AND REINSTATING MONARCHY AS A HEGEMONIC TOOL

10.1. The Pax Americana historic bloc: a global neo-liberalist project

The post-WWII world system as a historic bloc, involves the breakup of the colonial empires of the 19th century, and the emergence of the US as the leading economic, military and a political force in the international society²⁷⁷. The main quotidian of the post-world war II historic restructuring of the world system involved a political strategy by the United States to restructure the world capitalism and it included both economic, social and political dimensions, all under the pretence of capitalist progress²⁷⁸. This was made possible by the fact that after the WWII, the economic, and the technological supremacy of the United States was par none globally: the sheer volume of the United States' economic output right after the WWII alone accounted for more than 50 % of the global GNP²⁷⁹. Due to the dynamic nature of the American industrial capitalism, the scientific breakthroughs were swiftly applied into the creating of the military-industrial complex, which was the best in the post-WWII context. This together with the dominance the United States had in the field of information technologies crucial to economy helped to consolidate its position as the supreme powerhouse in the post-WWII world society.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Wyatt 1984, 223-242.

²⁷⁷ Agnew 1998, 105.

²⁷⁸ Mittelman 1997, 41.

²⁷⁹ Brzezinski 1997, 23.

²⁸⁰ *ibid*, 23-24.

The phase of the post-WWII era capitalist world order is more of an ideological project than the historic bloc of the Pax Britannica was. According to Cox²⁸¹, the 19th century territorial expansion of the imperial powers was connected to the rise of the manufacturing capitalism in the international economy, in which Britain ruled, and the social and ideological power of its bourgeoisie class, whose wealth was based on the manufacturing capitalism. Marx and Engels propose aptly how underlying the expansive British capitalism – and imperialism – there was also a geopolitical motive: to ensure the British rule of the global seas²⁸². They also proposed that Britain eventually created its own demise as a leading world power by exporting capital to its economic rival the United States, and predicted that the US would become a dominant world power²⁸³.

Trotsky²⁸⁴ sees the rise of the US in the dynamism of its capitalism versus the international system of nation-states; he puts the inter-relationship and the contradictions between Europe and America in the centre of his analysis. Trotsky says that the American capitalism had increased the productivity of labour to an unprecedented level in the peaceful conditions capitalism developed inside the US after the civil war²⁸⁵. At this stage, Trotsky sees that capitalism has a progressive element to it, as it implies the possibility of increasing the welfare of all the classes in society²⁸⁶. However, as the accumulation of capital and the realization of surplus value is a social process, capitalism as a mode of production has an inbuilt tendency to expand and transform itself beyond a single individual or a single nation-state²⁸⁷. He proposes that the huge dynamism of the US capitalism, as it emerged in the period between the WWI and WWII, simply could not be reproduced in the restricted system of the nation-states of Europe, neither could it be yet reproduced in what Trotsky calls the European-ruled Orient²⁸⁸.

The essential cultural element of the American hegemonic project is the linking of the capitalist economic mode of production with the political form of government based on the

²⁸¹ Cox 1999, 105. See also Gill 2008, 54.

²⁸² Gill 2008, 56-57.

²⁸³ *ibid*, 56.

²⁸⁴ Beams 2010.

²⁸⁵ Gramsci 2007, 302.

²⁸⁶ Beams 2010.

²⁸⁷ Marx-Engels 2010, 24-26.

²⁸⁸ Beams 2010.

American experience, the social myth of the liberal democracy as a universal normative standard of political organization of a society²⁸⁹.

This social myth on the link between liberal democracy and the capitalist mode of production derives from the intricate relationship between the state and the corporations in the US. Volpi²⁹⁰ sees America's post-WWII expansionist imperialism as a logical continuation of a policy approach, which dates back to the creating of federal presidential republic of the United States in the 1780s. He proposes that the initial intention of creating the federal presidential republic was in essence to preserve the economic elite's dominance through devising constitutional mechanisms, the purpose of which was ultimately to defend the elites' property interests, all under the normative rhetoric of freedom, liberty, and justice²⁹¹.

A geographical expansionist dimension was immanent in this policy from the beginning, as America was a vast territory with huge resources in the dawn of the rise of industrial capitalism. Add to it the background of the Founding Fathers who were all part of the elite – all of them were rich landowners. The creation of the weak central government with only limited powers was a compromise between the Northern industrialists and the Southern merchants, to create a favourable environment for the rise of the corporation throughout the North American continent. Corporate economic interests de facto moulded the important regulatory agencies and government offices.²⁹²

In the post-WWII context, the intention of the United States' political project was simply to facilitate the movement of capital on a transnational level and to create favourable conditions for economic gain and the accumulation of highest possible profit²⁹³. This involved guaranteeing access to the expanding flow of industrial raw material inputs to enhance the United States economic business activity²⁹⁴.

The historic bloc based on the "Pax Americana" was a structure in dominance in which the power configuration in the international society shifted from Europe to the US, and in which the central agencies of the US government had the dominant position²⁹⁵. However, it was not a hierarchical structure based on direct dominance by the United States, but a structure based

²⁸⁹ Gill 2008, 40-41.

²⁹⁰ Volpi 2009.

²⁹¹ Volpi 2009, xi-xiv.

²⁹² *ibid*, 87-88.

²⁹³ Mittelman 1997, 41.

²⁹⁴ Caldwell 1978, 8.

²⁹⁵ Cox 1981, 145.

on bargaining and negotiating by internationalized fragments of states²⁹⁶. Moreover, the promise of progress and development immanent in Fordist accumulative capitalism - the growth in mass consumption was the legitimizing element of the system, adding to its consensual value²⁹⁷. The dynamic basis of the system lay on the structures of capitalist production and social reproduction of the system – the system was easy to transfer across national boundaries and easily reproduced in any society around the globe under a military-political language: the slogans of development and modernity²⁹⁸.

The ideological battle between the Soviet Union and the US offered the US a possibility to advance the expansion of the free-market capitalism under the thinly veiled justification of defending the vague universalistic claims to protect the “Western civilization and the liberalistic free-market structures against communism”²⁹⁹. According to Cox³⁰⁰, the power figuration of the “Pax Americana” involved the United States playing similar leading role to Britain in its pursuing its own interests in the global economy. When we look at the economic structures in the post-WWII context, the economic structuration of the world did not involve major changes per se, as the post-WWII phase ipse facto only deepened the existing capitalist structures created during the colonial empires³⁰¹.

However, what was different compared to the British hegemony of the world system of the late 19th century, was the *international* geopolitical dimension of this organic alliance between the US, Europe and Japan, in the name of reconstructing the war-torn economies³⁰². This de facto meant laying the economic basis of the post-WWII world order on the premises of the liberal Fordist³⁰³ capitalism and free trade, first in Europe, and then globally. In Europe, the economic base of the war-torn countries was restructured around the principles of Fordist industrial capitalism, especially around the technologically advanced car and electrical corporate industries, where the principles of the Keynesian macroeconomic management

²⁹⁶ Cox 1981, 145.

²⁹⁷ Gill 2008, 61.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Gill 2008, 61.

³⁰⁰ Cox 1999, 103-104.

³⁰¹ Gill 2008, 60.

³⁰² Agnew 2004, 2.

³⁰³ Fordist capitalism here refers to industrial capitalism, maximizing capital accumulation, mass production and consumer capitalism. The other side of Fordism involves the mechanization of the worker and the alienation of the worker from the labour process, and the creation of the social stratum of skilled labour with high wages, which all creates new social contradictions. In other words, Fordism is understood here as a socio-political regime. See Gramsci 2007, 279-289; 301-315. See also Rupert 2000, 24.

mixed with the internationalization of the Rooseveltian New Deal with its principles of corporatism and state planning³⁰⁴.

On a social level, these arrangements implied a social contract between the state, the corporations, and the subordinate classes. Gramsci³⁰⁵ crystallizes this model by proposing that in this production model, the whole life is centred on the notions of production and consumption. The mass production model of industrial capitalism requires skilled labour, who are allowed higher wages and hence, a better standard of living. The corporations are guaranteed high capital accumulation. The state acts as a corporation itself, regulating its own investments through taxes, investments and state holdings – plus the state regulates the redistribution of wealth in the form of for instance subsidies or state bonds. This type of a social contract requires a certain type of a state to survive. Gramsci saw the United States liberal democracy as the model of a state in which this type of a social contract could survive.³⁰⁶

Gramsci says that the function of hegemony is born in a factory³⁰⁷. As said earlier, hegemony not only has a coercive dimension but also a consensual element to it. Trotsky sees that capitalism basically has a progressive element to it, as it implies the possibility of increasing the welfare of all the classes in society³⁰⁸. Herein is the beginning of the success of the American hegemonic project after the WWII.

The United States internationalized their hegemonic post-WWII project by establishing international institutions with its allies, the main aim of which was to ensure the rights of the US corporations to pursue their investments and profits *globally*³⁰⁹. The Bretton Woods conference created the system of institutions – the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO/GATT all were negotiated into force by the US and its European allies to facilitate the free trade and the distribution of power between the negotiating members³¹⁰. The Bretton Woods system also included the international monetary transactions tied to the American dollar as its basic unit, which meant tying the members' monetary policies to the American dollar³¹¹. This was to stabilize the international monetary system and prevent the type of a

³⁰⁴ Gill 2008, 60-61.

³⁰⁵ Gramsci 2007, 279-318. See also Volpi 2009, 87-92.

³⁰⁶ Gramsci 2007, 279-318. See also Volpi 2009, 87-92.

³⁰⁷ Gramsci 2007, 285.

³⁰⁸ Beams 2010.

³⁰⁹ Cox 1999, 104.

³¹⁰ Agnew 2004, 127-128.

³¹¹ Gilpin 2001, 235.

crisis of an international economy that happened in the 1930s; however, as Gilpin proposes, the real aim of creating the Bretton Woods system was to keep the value of the American dollar stable and enhance the United States' dominant position in the world³¹². Consolidating liberal capitalism through international institutions hid the notion that thus, on a material level, the US leadership would guarantee a universal development and well-being³¹³.

Consolidating the new capitalist world order further happened through emphasizing the ideological dimension, the ideological competition between communism and capitalism. To contain the rival economic order, the state-led communism, and its spread, through militarizing and securitizing the interests of the industrial capitalism, the US created a military alliance along the geopolitical axis formed by the United States with its allies in Europe and Japan. This militarization in turn fed the growth of the military-industrial complex and the development of extensive arms trade in the region.³¹⁴

10.2. The American neo-liberalist project in South East Asia and Thailand

To understand the complex dynamics of the relationship that developed between the United States and Thailand from the 1947 onwards, we have to look at Gramsci's methodological considerations regarding the analysis of situations, and apply his analysis in the historical context that the relationship begun to take shape. According to Gramsci³¹⁵, the key to understanding historical situations is the analysis of the relations of force on various levels of the situation. These levels comprise the relations of force firstly, on the international level, and secondly, the relations of force on a domestic level, it is the relations of force within a society, which not only consist of the economic relations between social forces but also of political hegemonic systems within a society, including the political parties and the military. The domestic level, the organic social relations within a society modifies the organic international relations of a state in an organic, changing international system. This relationship between the two levels is not unidirectional but bidirectional, as both levels influence each other. It is the totality of the social relations of force, which we have to look at

³¹² Gilpin 2001, 237.

³¹³ Gill 2008, 59.

³¹⁴ Agnew 2004, 127-130.

³¹⁵ Gramsci 2007, 176.

in our analysis in order to get a clear picture of a historical situation, not just separate components of it. The relations of force at the economic base of a society are the starting point in the analysis to look into the structures of domination, and on the base of this analysis assess whether in a particular society the conditions for the true transformation of that particular society exist at that given moment. The question of organisation is essential; the significance of the military lies in the fact that they are an organised force, always prepared, unlike other social forces that lack the comparable international organization.³¹⁶

At the same time, we also have to keep in mind that societal processes in every society evolve in a way unique to that particular society, and that no society will dissolve or transform itself into something new until all the productive forces for which there is room in that particular society have evolved³¹⁷.

Only after taking these vectors into consideration, will we be able to see if the situation is a manifestation of a continuation of an organic process or if the situation is conjunctural, it is a manifestation of a real transformation of a system (= society).³¹⁸

When we look at the post-WWII situation, the emergence of the United States as a dominant country in the global system of states represents a manifestation of a change in the world system. The reconstruction of structures of the global system after the WWII is a manifestation of rearranging the global spheres of influence into a new historic bloc under the hegemonic position of the United States in the economic, and cultural, political, and military sense.

If a state is in an economically weak position in the international system, according to Gramsci, the tendency is that within that particular state the hegemonic social forces try to exploit the situation and try to suppress the social forces in a subordinate position³¹⁹. This to Gramsci is more of a reflection of the particular state's international position than a representation of the total of the social forces within that state.³²⁰

After the WWII, the Southeast Asian region was an underdeveloped periphery in the global system in Washington's perspective. Still, Southeast Asia was vitally important to Washington both economically and militarily, as Southeast Asia had strategically important

³¹⁶ Gramsci 2007, 176; 181. See also the political role of the military in crisis of authority, pp. 210-218.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, 177.

³¹⁸ *ibid.*, 210-218.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, 2007, 176.

³²⁰ *ibid.*, 177.

raw materials, which the United States' industry depended on³²¹. Moreover, America's closest ally in Asia, Japan, depended on Southeast Asian rice³²². Japan had lost the war; however, after the war, due to Japan's crucial strategic position and its advanced stage of capitalist development in the region, tied Japan's development in the United States' sphere of influence in the region³²³.

This securitization of Washington's economic interests in Southeast Asia emerged from the ideological rivalry between the communist and the capitalist economic systems: Southeast Asia was to serve as a key buffer zone to contain the perceived threat presented by the Soviet Union and China, where the communists took over in 1949³²⁴. This all happened in the context of the emergence of the national liberation movements in the region, which aimed for independence from colonialism³²⁵.

In this grand scheme of the United States post-WWII project, integrating Thailand into the new economic world order was not of direct utmost importance in the region during the immediate years after the WWII. Initially, Americans' involvement in Thailand was indirect, linked more to ensuring its post-WWII allies' (Britain and France plus Japan) influence in the region and supporting their interests, which were first and foremost of economic nature. Both Britain and France needed American assistance in their efforts to keep their economic interests in the region intact. The British depended on the Thai rice for their troops in the Malayan peninsula. Thailand was also of crucial importance to the security of Malaya, as Malaya had tin and rubber, which the British needed. France needed Thailand as an ally to guarantee a peaceful buffer zone for its involvement in Indochina. As for the strategic alliance between Japan and the United States, Japan depended on the imports of the Thai rice. Thailand was also a crucial key to the security of the Malaccan Strait, a trade route crucial for Japan in its post-WWII economic recovery process.³²⁶

Thus, Thailand's role in the Pax Americana follows the logic of American capitalism's interests in Japan. Subsequently, the US interests in Thailand were connected not only with containing the communism in the South East Asian region, but also with the role planned for

³²¹ Jayanama 2003, 32-34.

³²² Baker-Phongpaichit 2008, 151-152.

³²³ Caldwell 1978, 9.

³²⁴ Zinn 439-440.

³²⁵ Jayanama 2003, 29.

³²⁶ Caldwell 1978, 9.

Thailand by the US, which was simply that Thailand's economy was to assist keeping the Japanese economy healthy, as Japan was of strategic importance to the US in the region³²⁷.

The consolidation of the American economic interests in South East Asia and in Thailand's particular case were carried out with the aid of the American capital, under the notion of economic progress, which was in concurrence with the interests of the local hegemonic Thai business elites³²⁸. What is particular in Thailand's case when compared to the other countries in the region regarding firstly, the relationship between Thailand and the US was the strong military nature of the consolidating of the American interests in the country³²⁹. The second particularity, regarding the US aid and its strong military aid to Thailand was the strengthening of the military as the consolidator of the hegemonic business elite networks' interests within Thailand³³⁰. Subsequent to this was the reinstating of the monarchy as a subservient tool to uphold the elite interests inside the country, masked under strong nationalist ideology³³¹.

Under the notion of economic progress, huge infrastructure projects were carried out inside the country with the US development aid, whose main aim was to fortify the military infrastructure for the US aims, and utilize Thailand's resources to the maximum in the service of the Cold War era US war operations in Southeast Asia. The domestic aim of the infrastructure projects was to consolidate the power of the Bangkok elite networks' administrative rule over the provinces outside Bangkok. Junya Lek Yimprasert³³² estimates the total figure of the direct American aid to the Thai military at approximately 2 billion USD between the years 1950-1987.³³³

10.3. Consolidating domestic hegemony: the rise of the military

When we look at the Pax Americana era (after WWII until the 1970s) from the Gramscian perspective, and its influence on the power structures in Thai society; and how the power structures formed during that era still have an effect during the current Thai political crisis; we could conclude that the Pax Americana era not only happened on the economical level but

³²⁷ Kesboonchoo Mead 2003, 49.

³²⁸ Bell 1978, 61-62.

³²⁹ Ibid., 62-65.

³³⁰ Kesboonchoo Mead 2003, 54-55.

³³¹ Ungpakorn 2010, 99.

³³² Yimprasert 2010, 8.

³³³ Ibid., 7-8.

the changes also happened on the ideological, on the super-structure level, as the changes ultimately consolidated the hegemony of the Thai elites, originally created during the Pax Britannica. What is unique to Thailand is the particular form of change in the structures of Thai society, which emerges from the historical analysis of that era, which has had a long-standing impact in preserving the old hegemonic order of the elite rule in Thai society. The changes that happened in the structures of power inside Thailand in this era have had a long-standing effect on Thai domestic political level up until now. Henceforth, as I see it, the change and transformation that the configuration of the network of the elites in Thai society underwent during the Pax Americana era on the domestic level, form the core of the elite regime rule that is breaking only now, during the current Thai political crisis.

The era of the Pax Americana historic bloc on the Thai domestic level entails the emergence of the development of the monarchic-military axis as the most significant consolidator of the hegemonic elite interests and the hegemonic elite regime rule. If we analyse the phenomenon further, we could conclude from the Gramscian perspective that in this axis, the military is the one whose position as a political actor is stronger. The position and the function of the monarchy is subservient to the strong military, and in this equation, monarchy serves as a useful unifying tool to keep the elite network regime in power. The shift of which elite network actor has been in the forefront of the realm of Thai politics has depended on the historical situation of the international system, however, the position of the military has always been strong since the Pax Americana era, be it then direct influence or indirect influence.

As mentioned earlier, the 1932 constitutional revolution lead to the abolition of absolute monarchy; however this was a nominal change only. In practice, the revolution did not bring about changes in the economic structures within the country, nor did it change the relation of forces within Thai society. Thailand's economy was extremely weak due to the worldwide economic depression, and depended heavily on the global rice trade. The only societal process the 1932 revolution induced was the strengthening of the military as a political force and diminishing monarchy's role into one fragment of the Thai ruling class³³⁴.

Within Thailand, there had been no real change between the relations of force, or in the structures of dominance. The situation within the country, as I interpret it, resembled Gramsci's Italy of the Risorgimento era, (as I already mentioned earlier in the context of the

³³⁴ Ungpakorn 2010, 126.

1932 revolution in chapter 9.3.), where there was a huge discrepancy in the relatively industrialized administrative centre (Bangkok), and the countryside in terms of economic development. The relationship was that of uneven development and dominance between the centre and the periphery, created during the Pax Britannica historic bloc when the capitalist mode of production had been implemented in Thailand. As in Italy, to guarantee the interests of Thailand's capitalist classes, the political and social dominance over the masses, 90% of whom got their living from agriculture, had been sealed under the umbrella concept of the strong nation state, to guarantee the Bangkok rule and the rule of the hegemonic elites.

If Italy of the Risorgimento era had one-dimensional division between the centre and the periphery, Thailand had two geographical periphery regions over which to implement the centre's hegemonic rule: the South and the North-eastern region, Isan, neither of which bore loyalty to the Bangkok centre. The four southernmost provinces are Muslim, their language and culture is Malay, and the provinces have up until today been the target of Thai internal colonization to assimilate them under the Bangkok rule, and any separatist tendencies have been handled heavy-handedly, often by the military³³⁵.

The second periphery region, the Northeast countryside, Isan, as the region is known in Thailand, has been another problematic periphery region for Bangkok: there was no experienced loyalty to Bangkok – Bangkok was far, and the loyalties lay with the local elites, as they had been under the feudal sakdina system. Isan's culture and language are again different from Bangkok and Isan's geographical vicinity to the communist Indochina and its influence was beyond the control of Bangkok up until the 1980s³³⁶.

Here we might go back to Gramsci's concept of passive revolution, which Gramsci uses oscillating the concept between two dialectical poles: revolution and restoration. Revolution here refers to major changes in the structure of hegemony, restoration to reforms that happen without major changes in the hegemonic structures³³⁷. Firstly, the passive revolution refers to the outside pressures to innovate and reform existing structures. These changes and reforms can happen without mass participation. Secondly, by passive revolution Gramsci refers to small changes and transformations of society that happen against the intentions of a ruling regime. These two different processes can occur simultaneously, or independently of each

³³⁵ Ungpakorn 2010, 179-182.

³³⁶ Baker – Phongpaichit 2008, 172-173.

³³⁷ Girling 1984, 389-90.

other; however, when they happen, they always strengthen each other³³⁸. Girling³³⁹ refers to Gramsci and his conclusion that the major of failure of the Italy of the Risorgimento era in unifying Italy was the fact that the passive revolution was realized via reformation without any major changes to the existing state framework. Girling then mirrors this situation with Thailand of the Pax Americana era, and proposes that Thailand underwent a similar process in the 1950s and 1960s, though the context was different: Thailand's rapid industrialization with American development aid as channelled through the World Bank happened within the old hegemonic framework of the elites and the military³⁴⁰.

I propose that the passive revolution in Thailand oscillated between the two poles of restoration/revolution in the time of entering Pax Americana at the end of the 1940s and during the 1950s when it came to the role of the state and adjusting to the economic and political reorganization of the Thai society in the aftermath of the WWII. On the other hand, there were the republican reformers who had the vision of the “good” state; a version of a state capitalism with economic planning and allocating resources to the common purposes, to guarantee the welfare of the citizens³⁴¹. On the other hand, there were the royalist elites, new business elites and the military whose vision of a unified Thai state was that of promoting the US influenced vision of private capitalism - and advancing their own interests at the same, all under the unified nationalist state model, adopted from the West in the late 19th century, and ultimately applied in Thai government's policies both internationally and domestically with the elite generals and business elites³⁴².

If we keep in mind my initial proposal, that Thailand has been in the process of what Gramsci³⁴³ calls an organic crisis of authority, or the “crisis of the state”, since the 1932 revolution; and then mirror the effects of the Pax Americana – the strengthening of the military in Thai politics - against this proposal; and again reflect upon the current Thai political crisis and its dynamics and the strong role of the military in it, then we could conclude that it is in the era of the Pax Americana, where the strong position of the Thai military in the realm of Thai politics emerges from, ultimately.

If we add to this analysis the Pax Americana structural changes in the international society, in South East Asia, and inside Thailand, and take note of the pressure to innovate the existing

³³⁸ Arrighi 2002, 9.

³³⁹ Girling 1984, 389-90.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 389-390.

³⁴¹ Baker-Phongpaichit 2008, 140-141.

³⁴² Elliott 1978, 35-36.

³⁴³ Gramsci 2007, 210.

structures within Thai society via context- related reforms, we could conclude that the social forces inside Thailand were in a position of “passive revolution”, in which the necessary reforms were carried out under the strong autocratic rule of the military governments of generals Phibun and Sarit in the 1950s, without real mass participation on the political decisions. This is not to say, that there were no counter-hegemonic oppositional forces inside Thailand during the 1950s. On the contrary, besides the Communist who was operating underground, there were factions of a strong civil society, like the Labour Movement, who demanded more representation in political decision-making and opposition to the autocratic suppression of political dissent³⁴⁴.

Elliott³⁴⁵ attributes the rise of the military and the autocratic military rule of the 1950s in Thailand to the failure of the budding state capitalism to respond to the necessary structural changes required by the new international situation. The bourgeoisie class in the country was mainly Chinese, who rapidly took advantage by the economic boom the Pax Americana created in the beginning of the 1950s³⁴⁶. The local elite oligarchs and military generals benefited from joining the Chinese-owned businesses: it was symbiotic relationship, in which the Chinese merchant class controlled the capital and the exploitation of the labour resources, and the military and the bureaucrats grafted and protected the businesses, that the merchant class could not have created on their own, as the access route to the American capital was through the domestic ruling military and bureaucratic elites of Bangkok³⁴⁷. This, as many researchers have stated, was a new version of the old colonialism of the Pax Britannica, which involved the nation state as a straightjacket, within which the hegemonic local and the transnational elite networks operated, exploiting the resources of the country, and exploiting its people³⁴⁸.

Thus, during the Pax Americana era, the economic reorganisations of Thai society structures were carried out de facto within the old framework of the elite rule. There were no democratic reforms carried out within the structures of society, either. Here, I find that only a brief, operational definition of the terms “democracy” is sufficient to clarify the notion of democracy. Two international relations scholars coming from different cultural contexts, Chase-Dunn³⁴⁹ and Ungpakorn³⁵⁰ propose that democracy in the sense of “popular control

³⁴⁴ Hewison –Rodan 1994, 245-249.

³⁴⁵ Elliott 1978, 34-35.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ See for instance Pasuk-Phongpaichit 2008, 166; or Connors 2003, 2-3.

³⁴⁹ Chase-Dunn 1999, 206.

over collective decision-making” (definition by Chase-Dunn) was not invented in Greece, but it was a feature of all societies on all continents before the complex hierarchical systems of chiefdoms and states were created. In addition, Ferrara³⁵¹ refers to the concept of democracy in a similar way as the two aforementioned scholars. Uhlin³⁵² proposes the terms “societal democracy” and “societal democratization” respectively: the precondition to the societal democratization, is that in the society, the principles of common participation in the political activity, justice, pluralism, and tolerance are practiced. Henceforth, a minimal definition as this may be, this definition supports Gramsci’s notion that for example parliamentary democracy as a form of representative democracy may in fact be in service of an autocratic system and hence, a straightjacket state, instead of being in the service of the people³⁵³.

In Thailand, the autocratic form of government was the rule throughout the Pax Americana era of the 1950s, and it was silently approved by the US hegemon in the world system, Thailand’s patron state. The weak efforts to reform the Thai state structure in the 1960s and 1970s through semi-civilian governments were not successful, in the sense, that the military retained their option to interfere in governance. The military was also at the forefront of Thai politics against the people’s uprisings of the 1970s and people’s demands for more participation in decision-making and social justice, prompted by the civil right movement in the US in the 1960s³⁵⁴. In this sense, the Thai semi-civilian governments of the Pax Americana era of the 1960s and 1970s, as a form of representative democracy, were in Gramscian sense only tools of the hegemonic elite rule, instead of serving the people.

In the above sense, the economic reforms in Thailand of the Pax Americana era, apart from serving the interests of the American capitalism and imperialism, served the interests of the elites within the country only. The reforms did not benefit the citizens of the country and the development of democratic reforms, even though the ordinary benefited nominally from the economic reforms and industrialisation³⁵⁵. More people worked in the industry sector now, and fewer in the agricultural sector; still, when we look at the minimum wage as one indicator

³⁵⁰ Ungpakorn, personal conversation 19/02/2014.

³⁵¹ Ferrara 2010, 129-130.

³⁵² Uhlin 2002, 156.

³⁵³ Gramsci 2007, 253-254;

³⁵⁴ Ungpakorn 2010, 130-133.

³⁵⁵ From the late 1950s, the Thai economy grew at an average of 7% per year. This figure is one of the fastest rates in the developing world, see Baker-Phongpaichit 2008, 166.

of “development”, for instance, the minimum wage had stayed the same between the early fifties and the year 1973, while the commodity prices had gone up by 50%³⁵⁶.

10.4. Monarchy as a hegemonic tool

During the current Thai political crisis, ignoring the question of the position of Thai monarchy in the power structure of Thai politics is neigh impossible. Especially after the military coup 2006, the ideological slogan of “protecting the monarchy” has become a staple in the rhetoric of the conservative royalists (Yellow Shirts)³⁵⁷. In the name of protecting the monarchy, simultaneously, the use of Thailand’s draconian Lèse Majesté law has increased; it is mainly used now to silence political opposition through the deterrence factor³⁵⁸. David Streckfuss³⁵⁹ says that until the late 1990s, there was practically no use of Lèse Majesté legislation in Thailand; however, since the late 1990s, and especially since the military coup in 2006, the Lèse Majesté cases have multiplied hundredfold. Streckfuss says that in the current Thai political crisis, the use of the Lèse Majesté can be compared to the old form of state suppression to silence criticism, not only of monarchy but also of the state institutions and of the army³⁶⁰. Those that the Lèse Majesté has been used against since the military coup 2006, include a vast array of people from diverse backgrounds: academics, political activists, Red Shirt movement leaders, and also ordinary people³⁶¹.

Here, a question arises of what the role of the monarchy actually is in the whole picture of the dynamic power structure processes in Thai politics. According to the Thai constitution, Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, which has no stake in politics³⁶². Previous research on Thai politics, however, has interpreted that Thai monarchy actually has had - and keeps on having an active role in Thai politics³⁶³. Many researchers have also previously pointed out the position of monarchy as initially being an ideological project of the military regime of

³⁵⁶ Ungpakorn 2002, 192.

³⁵⁷ See for instance Wall Street Journal 02/02/2014.

³⁵⁸ Ungpakorn 2010, 95-96. Insulting monarchy, Lèse Majesté, is punishable by a jail sentence, minimum two years per charge.

³⁵⁹ Connors 2011, 139-149.

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*

³⁶¹ See collected cases for instance in the regularly updated webpage “Thailand Lèse Majesté Law”, The New Asia Observer – All on Asia.

³⁶² Jackson 2010, 43.

³⁶³ See for instance McCargo 2005; Ungpakorn 2010, Streckfuss 2010.

general Sarit in the late 1950s to unify the monolithic Thai state, and to legitimize the centralized Bangkok elite dominance over provinces³⁶⁴. McCargo³⁶⁵ has coined the informative term of the “network monarchy” to shed light on the influence of the political networks of the King and his close associates, and their intervention in the Thai political events. Ungpakorn³⁶⁶ points to the symbiotic relationship between the military and the King as serving the interests of the hegemonic elite networks, where the King represents the conservative ideology, which legitimizes the repressive rule of the military and their allies.

My own view of the role of the Thai monarchy in Thai politics follows the above line of interpretation of the monarchy being a useful ideological tool for military and the oligarchs to preserve the old hegemonic order of the elite networks rule and legitimize that rule. This articulation of the monarchy as a hegemonic tool emerges when we again follow the Gramscian methods, look at the historical events, and compare them to the public image of monarchy, as promoted in the public realm. The controversies between the historical events and the public image of the monarchy emerge both on the realm of the politico-ideological level, as well as on the level of the base structure (economic organisation).

As discussing the topic from this perspective is a banned topic in Thailand and hence only a few researchers have brought forward their views of the monarchy’s influence, I will have to suffice with the few sources available. Ungpakorn³⁶⁷ proposes outright that the King as such is weak and has no power, and that he is a puppet of the military and the oligarchs, and bases his claims on mirroring the historical events when the King could have taken a stand in favour of democratic reforms on the political realm, like supporting progress-minded reforms. On the contrary, as Ungpakorn proposes, during the major political crises, for instance in the 1973 and the 1976 public uprisings against harsh military rule and the military and the paramilitary violence that ensued, the King has always sided with the military and the conservative forces in the society against the reformist factions of society³⁶⁸.

In addition, other researchers have pointed this perspective out when it comes to analysing the military coup in 2006: many researchers have proposed that the military coup and the ousting of the Prime Minister Taksin were directly backed by the palace³⁶⁹. Another example of the King siding with the conservative elites is the Red Shirt Movement street protests in 2010,

³⁶⁴ McCargo 2005, 503.

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Ungpakorn 2010, 96.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 96; 103.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 103-111.

³⁶⁹ See for instance Hewison- Kitirianglarp 2010, 179.

which demanded for social reforms and social justice and which ended in the Thai military dispersing the protests with violence³⁷⁰. The palace was quiet regarding the 92 deaths and the thousands injured in the protests.

These arguments are in stark contrast as to how the position of monarchy is presented in the Thai academic context, and also to some extent in the mainstream international academic research on Thailand. In this narrative, the King is above politics; he is portrayed as a semi-divine being; he is the unifier of the Thai nation and the omnipotent benefactor his people. On a practical everyday level, this myth is reproduced everywhere on an everyday basis in Thailand: the King's pictures are everywhere, the Thai state media shows the daily activities of the Royals every evening, in the cinemas the King's hymn is played before the movie; the King is the head of the Buddhist religion, just to cite a few examples. Any criticism of the monarchy is forbidden. Peter Jackson³⁷¹ has proposed the excellent term "the regime of images" to analyse how the myth of the King is being reproduced in people's minds via media; the mythical perspective lives on by itself now, because the contents of the myth are in the images themselves, as a result of efficient and society-permeating reproduction.

Now, if we go back to the time of the Pax Americana era, in the late 1950s when the reinstating of the monarchy begun, we can trace the roots of the usefulness of the monarchy in the hands of the hegemonic elite networks, and how it serves their interests – and how the monarchy de facto is a tool of control inside the power structures of Thai society.

Since the abolition of absolute monarchy in 1932, monarchy had been one faction of elites only and declined in significance; however, the royalist factions of the elites held considerable influence behind the scenes³⁷². However, the active reinstating the monarchy only began in the late 1950s during the military dictator Sarit's regime³⁷³. At this time, the economic boom brought forth by the American involvement in Southeast Asia and in Thailand –the Pax Americana phase – and its ideological dimension of containing communism in the region required a stable political system inside Thailand. A stable political system was the prerequisite for continuous access to American capital. As already mentioned earlier, from the centre-periphery system perspective, Bangkok rulers did not have a full administrative control over the periphery provinces at that time. For instance, the life in the rural Northeast at that time had basically no connection to the

³⁷⁰ Thabchumpon – McCargo 2011, 993-994.

³⁷¹ Jackson 2004.

³⁷² Ungpakorn 2010, 99.

³⁷³ Keyes 1987, 76-77.

Bangkok centre: farmers' life was based on local patron-client networks, where the local elites controlled the inflow and the outflow of goods and capital³⁷⁴. Neither did the government have control over the new merchant elites, for whom the mantra of development had less appeal than their possible increased influence on the decision and the policy-making processes³⁷⁵. To appease the new elites, the Americans, and to gain control over the provinces, Sarit included nationalism to his government's policies³⁷⁶.

Sarit's notion of strong state involved a monolithic conception of a unified Thai nation state, with one religion – Buddhism, one language and one King as the head of state, and as the head of the organized Buddhist religion³⁷⁷. If we interpret the contents of this ideological project further, it involves the all-encompassing construct of the notion of “khwaampenthai” – Thainess; what it means to be Thai³⁷⁸. What this means in practice is that the notion involves the subjection of a Thai citizen to the Thai state; it subjects the Thai citizen to be loyal to Buddhist religion, and loyal ultimately to the King, who is the head of the religion inside the country. This construct is, as Hewison and Kitirianglarp³⁷⁹ propose, a unity based on moral principles, which also ultimately entails a hierarchical conception of society. Subsequently, the King's position in this equation is an idealized one: a mythical humdrum of animistic religion and Buddhist beliefs – the King is the virtuous Buddhist King who as the result of his gathered merit in previous lifetimes is demi-god, and who is the epitome of virtue amongst the people³⁸⁰.

The reinstating of monarchy involved also the resuscitation of the “ratchasap,” the complicated Royal vocabulary, and prostrating in front of the Royals, to indicate the social difference between the ordinary people and the royalty. During the Sarit era, King Phumipon became a visible figure to the public with his public appearances both in Bangkok and in the provinces³⁸¹.

Now we might ask whose interests this ideological project of reinstating of the monarchy ultimately served. During the Pax Americana, it served both the local elites' interests and the American interests. Here again, one has to keep in mind the dynamics of the relationship

³⁷⁴ Baker-Phongpachit 2008, 158.

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*

³⁷⁶ Hewison-Kitirianglarp 2010, 186-187.

³⁷⁷ Baker-Phongpaichit 2008, 176-177.

³⁷⁸ Chachavalpongpun 2005, 12.

³⁷⁹ Hewison-Kitirianglarp 2010, 186-188.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*; Jackson 2010, 31-33.

³⁸¹ Krittian 2010, 218.

between the economic system, the state and the civil society, and the power configurations embedded within Thai society during the Pax Americana era. Hence, reinstating the monarchy via nationalist ideology helped the Bangkok rulers gain control over the provinces, and it assisted them in stabilizing the political situation in the country, not only under Sarit's government but also under the governments who succeeded Sarit in the 1960s³⁸². The ideological project of reinstating the monarchy, it could be concluded, also served the American interests in the country and assisted the Americans in their hegemonic effort of gaining a stronger foothold in both in Thailand and in Southeast Asia. Thus, reinstating monarchy served the economic and the political interests of the neoliberalist local elites and the military, as well as the neoliberalist transnational economic, military, and political interests of the hegemonic patron state of the United States during the era of the Pax Americana. This applies both to the function of the hegemonic processes inside Thailand, as well as in the Southeast Asian region.

An important part of the hegemonic ideological function of the monarchy inside Thailand in the 21st century has been promoting King Phumipon's economic philosophy of "Sufficiency economy" (setakit phopiang), which the King developed during the 1990s and which was published in the aftermath of the 1997-98 Southeast Asian economic crisis (see below). Its central idea, as I see it, is to promote self-sufficiency, localization and basically, a hierarchical society based on moral leadership. Here, let it be mentioned, that the idea of the Sufficiency economy was the King's and his close associates reaction to the economic crisis and the measures that the Thai government took in 1998 to save the Thai economy: Prime Minister Chuan's government accepted World Bank loans with tough conditions³⁸³. Handley³⁸⁴ proposes that the King and his close advisors saw the economic crisis as a result of capitalism's greed and ignorance of the King's ideal of his humble, virtue-guided kingdom.

"Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that guides the livelihood and behaviour of people at all levels, from the family to the community to the country, on matters concerning national development and administration. It calls for a 'middle way' to be observed, especially in pursuing economic development in keeping with the world of globalization. Sufficiency means moderation and reasonableness, including the need to build a reasonable immune system against shocks from the outside or from the inside. Intelligence, attentiveness, and extreme care should be used to ensure that all plans and every step of their implementation are

³⁸² Baker-Phongpaichit 2008, 175-180.

³⁸³ Handley 2006, 412-415.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*

based on knowledge. At the same time we must build up the spiritual foundation of all people in the nation, especially state officials, scholars, and business people at all levels, so they are conscious of moral integrity and honesty and they strive for the appropriate wisdom to live life with forbearance, diligence, self-awareness, intelligence, and attentiveness. In this way we can hope to maintain balance and be ready to cope with rapid physical, social, environmental, and cultural changes from the outside world.”³⁸⁵

Herein another huge contrast emerges between the public image of the King and reality. The King preaches and promotes sufficiency economy among his subaltern. However, the economic interests of Thai monarchy in the Thai economy are considerable. The King is the world’s richest monarch, with estimated total assets of 30 billion USD³⁸⁶. The King’s assets are organized under the Crown Property Bureau, a tax-exempt anomaly of an institution, which is only accountable to the King directly³⁸⁷. The Crown Property Bureau owns, among other things, large areas of land in central Bangkok; it is active in the banking sector, and it has joint ventures together with multinational corporations³⁸⁸. Based on the above figures, the King himself is a major – and a modern - business investor in Thai –and in the international economy. His interests are in concurrence with the conservative elites’ interests.

Thus, as Ungpakorn³⁸⁹ concludes, the importance of the monarchy to the modern elites of Thailand lies in the ideological value of the construct of monarchy, which was created during the Pax Americana era. The value of monarchy as an ideological tool of the conservative elites has held its validity up until the current crisis. In 2000s, it has become more difficult for the Thai military to legitimize military coups outright. However, the symbiotic relationship between the military and the palace – the former, as Gramsci³⁹⁰ says, a parasitic class with no function in the economic production, and the latter, an ideological tool in the service of the oligarchs guarantees the usefulness of the monarchy for the hegemonic regime. The military relies on the instigated mythical power of the King to legitimize their strong position in Thai society³⁹¹. This symbiotic relationship also prevents any demands of the civil society for justice that is more social and reform, and any true political reforms, as for that matter, from being put into practice.

³⁸⁵ Krongkaew 2003.

³⁸⁶ Montlake 29/04/2011.

³⁸⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Oyyanont 2008, 155; 177-179; 184-185.

³⁸⁹ Ungpakorn 2010, 114.

³⁹⁰ Gramsci 2007, 213.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*

11. BREAKDOWN OF HEGEMONY: THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN ECONOMIC CRISIS, TAKSIN, AND THE WAR OF POSITION

11.1. Oligopolistic neoliberalism and the neoliberalist offensive in Thailand's economic crisis 1997-98

The mainstream interpretations of the Southeast Asian economic crisis of 1997-98 often involve the moral prerogative of American capitalism's superiority to the Asian capitalism³⁹². These notions interpret the Southeast Asian economic crisis to have been the result of weak finance sectors, poorly regulated economies, lack of transparency, and political systems, in which corruption and cronyism rule³⁹³. American analysts, in particular, have blamed the close relationship networks between local businesspersons and politicians, the existence of the family businesses where the management and the ownership are intertwined processes, and the borrowing from banks instead of investing in the stock markets³⁹⁴.

Seen from the Gramscian historical perspective and the historical analysis of situations, this interpretation lacks weight, as it does not take into account the local specific context, and it is devoid of any historical context altogether. From the Gramscian perspective, the Southeast Asian 1997-98 economic crisis is connected to the systemic processes on the international level. Handling it as an isolated crisis from the Western self-righteous moral perspective, as the mainstream analysis does, by implying that the Southeast Asian economic crisis happened because of the implicated inferiority of the economic and political structures in the Southeast Asian societies, is a questionable interpretation altogether. A more comprehensive analysis and an insight into the changes and implications on the international systemic level is needed, as the 1997-98 Southeast Asian economic crisis, as well as Thailand's economic crisis at that time correlates to the changes in the international systemic level after the Pax Americana era.

Since the demise of the Bretton Woods organizational structure of the world capitalist system in the 1970s, which included the political demise of the Cold War era, a new form of the US-led capitalism has emerged, which as I mentioned earlier, Gill calls disciplinary neoliberalism. By this, he means the spread of the capitalism and the intensified globalisation, and their ingrained ideological implications. This disciplinary neoliberalism is similar in nature to the colonialist expansion of the Pax Britannica and the ensuing US neoliberalist

³⁹² Hamilton 1999, 46.

³⁹³ Phongpaichit – Baker 2000, 4-6.

³⁹⁴ Wailertsak 2008, 19.

hegemonic project of the Pax Americana era: promoting free trade, free capital flows, and capitalism as the preferable economic mode of organisation. What are different to the previous hegemonic historic bloc eras in the world system in the modern neoliberalist capitalist project are the speed and the scale of the integration of the global trade and the transnational capital flows and their effects on individual states in the world system – and their effects on the socio-political organization structures within the individual states³⁹⁵.

Gill³⁹⁶ specifies his definition of disciplinary neoliberalism in this context into the concept of *oligopolistic neoliberalism*, as he proposes that the current economic global system ultimately serves the strong only – the huge transnational corporations and major institutional investors of a global scale, in which he includes, for instance, the international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. In this universal global economy, for the first time in history, the integrated global economy transcends the boundaries of the nation-state. The integrated economic system also transcends the particular national ideologies that have been relevant within the boundaries of individual nation-states, as this type of an economic system requires a restructuring of a state, civil society, culture, and political economy³⁹⁷. Consequently, the logic of this integrated economic system favours a political system that is conducive to the pressures from outside – a government that prioritizes free trade and free flow of transnational capital³⁹⁸.

Hence, Marxist researchers interpret the Southeast Asian and Thailand's economic crisis from this perspective. They tie Thailand's national economic crisis to the boom-and-bust cycle of international capitalism itself. Thus, for instance, Ungpakorn³⁹⁹ sees Thailand's economic crisis as being the result of the uncontrolled competition for profit and falling rates of profit first and foremost, on a global scale, which mirrors itself on a local scale in Thai economy; the increased investment in fixed capital, instead of the of hiring of labour, is the reason for the falling profits⁴⁰⁰. Over-production of export products on a global scale, followed by the overproduction of exports on a national scale, and overproduction and falling profit rates especially on a real estate sector, are the reasons why the economy bubble burst in Thailand⁴⁰¹.

³⁹⁵ Agnew 2004, 2.

³⁹⁶ Gill 1995, 405.

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*

³⁹⁸ Beeson 2003, 10-11.

³⁹⁹ Ungpakorn 2010, 160-161.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ Hewison 2005: 314; Ungpakorn 2010: 160-161.

Let it also be mentioned here that the crash of 1997 was in stark contrast to Thailand's economic development in the previous decades: before the economic crisis of the 1997-98, Thailand had experienced an average annual GDP growth of 8% between the years 1959-1996, and it never fell below 4.8%⁴⁰². Still, the economic, social and political structures established under the Pax Americana era, had undergone only little changes during this constant economic growth period⁴⁰³.

The IMF bailout package required strong measures to restructure financial institutions, tight fiscal and monetary policy, a reform programme, which included keeping the wages low, privatization of state enterprises, reform of the civil servant sector, lowering obstacles for foreign investment, etc.⁴⁰⁴. Phongpaichit and Baker⁴⁰⁵ say that regarding the economic organisation of Thai society, the main consequence of the IMF bailout package was surrendering the Thai sovereignty of its economic policy to tight austerity measures, privatization, and financial restructuring. What this meant in practice was that the 17.5 bn USD bailout package enabled the IMF and the US patrons of global capitalism “to open the Thai economy up for greater foreign penetration, including Japan's involvement in 1999.”

Seen from Gramscian perspective of how the power relations in Thai society were organized during the growth years between 1959-1996, as I proposed earlier, this was the era of “the passive revolution.” The power relations had their roots in the Pax Americana period of the “development” paradigm - the government would support financial capital, domestic financial capital would provide the growth, and the military would support the hegemonic order and control of the ruling elite networks⁴⁰⁶.

Thailand's 1997 economic crisis and the ensuing neoliberalist offensive, as Hewison⁴⁰⁷ calls the IMF, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank-assisted concerted effort to “rescue” Thailand's economy, without the slightest concern on the social consequences embedded in it, was to prove a revolution on many levels. De facto, I propose, in concert with my initial research question that the economic crisis prompted a series of developments, which ultimately led to the beginning of the breakdown of the hegemonic rule of the Thai elite networks. This happened first on the level of the base structure of Thai society in the form of restructuring the domestic economic base, and later on, on the level of the

⁴⁰² Phongpaichit – Baker 2000, 17.

⁴⁰³ Hewison 2005, 323-324.

⁴⁰⁴ Wailerssak 2008, 52-53.

⁴⁰⁵ Phongpaichit – Baker 2000, 36.

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ Hewison 2005.

superstructure, by which I mean the politico-ideological level. Henceforth, I propose that the consequences of the neoliberalist offensive reach all the way to Thailand's current political crisis. The reasons for the neoliberalist offensive and the form of social change it ultimately motored, on the other hand, can be traced to the long-term capitalist development in Thailand.

The social change that the economic crisis and the IMF bailout package caused – the complete restructuring of the domestic capitalist class and the dissatisfaction at the austerity measures of the working classes - enabled the multimillionaire Taksin Shinawatra's rise to power and his Thai Rak Thai party policies. It also enabled the rise in the political consciousness of the urban and the rural poor. Thai Rak Thai's pro-poor policies gave the poor an impression that they matter, and that they can participate in the decision-making in the matters concerning them. This ultimately was the prerequisite for the factions of the civil society to challenge the hegemonic elite networks' rule. Herein lies the reason why the current Thai political crisis has lasted so long, since the military coup in 2006: expressed in Gramscian terminology: the masses have emerged as a unified counter-hegemonic force, and the political situation has shifted from the situation of passive revolution into a situation of the war of position.

Herein is the power of the Gramscian perspective: historical analysis of structures and situations enable us to obtain the whole picture of the dynamics of a particular crisis and articulate change and transformation in a way that the mainstream political theories neglect. Hence, these consequences of Thailand's economic crisis and their significance form the core argument of my thesis: that a new phase began in Thai politics after the economic crisis, which relates both to the consequences of the IMF "rescue operation" on the base structure level, and to the processes on the superstructure level.

The new phase paradigm that forms the core of my thesis began during the restructuring of the Thai economy according to the rule set by the international fiscal institutions. Thailand's economic crisis and the ensuing implementing of the IMF reorganisation of Thailand's economy put an end to the unlimited growth ideal, the development paradigm, under which the economy had been steered since the Pax Americana era. It also put an end to the uneasy social contract borne in that era, where the hegemonic alliance between the ruling elite networks and the army had dominance over the masses in both economy and politics. The economic crisis had caused a rift in the ruling elite networks, and those within the elites who did not benefit from the IMF-bailout package, were not happy with the new arrangement. However, it was the rural and the urban poor, who bore the brunt of the austerity measures

and the IMF economic reform⁴⁰⁸. Still their response to the crisis only came in 2001 when the multimillionaire businessperson Taksin Shinawatra entered the political arena with his populist policies, which included the rural and the urban poor in the political decision-making through the Thai Rak Thai Party political platform⁴⁰⁹.

11.2. Post-1997-98 social contract

If we look at Thailand's economic crisis of 1997-98, and the social transformation it set in motion from the Gramscian perspective, this is the crucial temporal conjuncture point, where the central theme of my thesis sets in. Thailand's economic crisis, as I see it, is the beginning of the new phase in Thai politics when the hegemony of the elite networks' rule begins to crumble, and when the counterhegemonic masses as an active political force emerge, challenging the hegemonic rule of the elite networks that have ruled Thailand since the Pax Britannica era. Gramsci calls this situation the war of position between two equal configurations of social forces, as mentioned earlier. In Gramscian sense, the polarization of Thai politics into two opposite camps in Thailand's current historical political crisis is a manifestation of this war of position situation.

In Gramscian perspective, Thailand's 1997-98 economic crises, and the international neoliberal offensive that followed it – the IMF bailout package – and the socio-political consequences of the crisis are a manifestation of a new phase of an organic crisis, the crisis of authority. This phase happens often, though not always, as I have stated previously, in a historical situation when the economic structures of a particular society are organized in a new way so, that the position of various social configurations in the power structure of a society change accordingly.

At the core of my interpretation of the post-economic crisis as a new phase in Thai politics, is the Gramscian notion of seeing an organic crisis as an opportunity. A historical crisis situation accordingly, is seen as an *opportunity* for various social forces to create alternative ways to organize society in a crisis situation. In this type of a situation, new solutions are needed. This type of a situation also indicates a crux where the masses have become alienated from the

⁴⁰⁸ Ungpakorn 2010, 161-163.

⁴⁰⁹ Phongpaichit – Baker 2000, 155-157.

mechanist ideologies that the hegemonic elites stick to and use coercively, in order to keep the cohesion and the power structures of the old system intact, because it serves their interests⁴¹⁰.

I propose that Thailand's current political polarization into the Yellow and the Red camps, respectively, is a result of the processes on the levels of the base and the superstructures of Thai society that the economic crisis of the 1997-98 set in motion. I will clarify the base structure changes; it is, the contents of the policies implemented during Taksin's era later on in this chapter. To support my argument of a new phase in Thai politics – the breakdown of the elite hegemony rule and the current war of position situation– one has to articulate and outline the underlying transformative social changes and processes on the politico-ideological superstructure level under the implementation of the Thai Rak Thai Party policies between the years 2001-2006 when Taksin and the Thai Rak Thai Party were in power. I see that these processes are that developed during those years, are at the core of Thailand's current political crisis stalemate.

These processes are firstly, the inclusion of the masses in the political decision-making and the consequent rise of the political consciousness of the rural and the urban poor, and their rise as an active political force. This I see as the most important effect of the Thai Rak Thai Party era of 2001-2006. Thai Rak Party ultimately democratized Thai politics, and their significance is in the fact that the urban and the rural poor experienced that their vote and their voice mattered. No other party in Thai politics had ever done this before⁴¹¹. As Ferrara⁴¹² says, before Thai Rak Thai Party's political platform, especially the rural voters were always considered as too unsophisticated by the Bangkok elites - as not being capable of making rational enough judgments on how the country should be governed and what kinds of policies should be implemented⁴¹³. Taksin's Thai Rak Thai Party brought end to that perspective. despite the Taksin government's questionable policies in the Muslim Southern provinces of Thailand and his government's War On Drugs in 2003, which initially targeted the kingpins of the drug trade; and in the name of which an estimate of 1500 extrajudicial killings were performed⁴¹⁴.

Secondly, and directly derived from this, is the further deepening of the class divisions in Thai society because of the ideological threat of the masses to the hegemonic elite rule, as

⁴¹⁰ Gramsci 2007, 275-276.

⁴¹¹ Ferrara 2010, 39-41.

⁴¹² *ibid.*

⁴¹³ *ibid.*, 39.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.*, 11. This figure has never been confirmed, as Ferrara also states.

experienced by the elites, who wanted to keep their dominance over the masses⁴¹⁵. Thirdly, Taksin's favouritism of the businesses close to his own clique, which came from the "new" Sino-Thai business elites, as opposed to the old power families, caused a rift within the elites, and turned many of those who had initially backed him, against him⁴¹⁶. The fourth process stems from the third process, and it concerns the position of the army and the bureaucrats whose position had never been questioned before.

During the years 2001-2006, the military was pushed in the background in Thai politics, which the various factions of the military did not take to lightly⁴¹⁷. Moreover, though this can be disputed, Taksin's War on Drugs, which initially aimed at destroying the kingpins of the drug trade, was on a symbolic level, a warning to some high officers in the army who were involved in the poppy trade operations⁴¹⁸. These factors together strengthened the alliance of the old conservative elites and the military. The dissatisfaction of this ultraconservative alliance that had not benefited from Thai Rak Thai Party's governance ultimately led to the formation of the Yellow Shirts, the royalist People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) whose call for military intervention in politics prompted the palace-approved military coup in 2006⁴¹⁹. The military coup, however, was not winning only for the conservative sections of the Thai society. As Ungpakorn⁴²⁰ says, the reason why the military coup happened was also a result of various sections of the urban middle-class civil society joining the conservative forces, forming a cross-class alliance with the military and elites. This phenomenon, a middle-class people's movement joining the conservative forces marks also the recent protests that have been going on in Bangkok since November 2013 under the name of the People's Democratic Reform Committee, who prioritize a political reform at the cost of the parliamentary election process⁴²¹.

At this point, it might be worthwhile to remind the reader of "the whole picture": that the 1997-98 economic crises were a result of a long-time capitalist development in Thailand, set against the development of the processes in the international system, as interpreted earlier. Why the historical situation of the new phase of an organic crisis in the post-1997-98 reality is completely different to the phases of the organic crisis that have imbued Thai superstructural

⁴¹⁵ Connors – Hewison 2008, 2.

⁴¹⁶ Ferrara 2010, 45-47.

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*, 74-76.

⁴¹⁸ Lintner 2000, 13-15.

⁴¹⁹ Ungpakorn 2010, 11-12.

⁴²⁰ Ungpakorn 2008, 20-21.

⁴²¹ McCargo 2014. The Guardian 24/01/2014.

level since the 1932 revolution, can be interpreted, through looking at Gramsci's notions of the passive revolution and the war of position, respectively.

There are other researchers, too, who have referred to the post-economic crisis – as a revolution, like Hewison⁴²², for instance. Ungpakorn⁴²³ also sees Thailand's current political crisis as resulting from the processes set in motion by the 1997-98 crisis. Ferrara⁴²⁴ is another researcher who focuses more on a syncretic historical perspective to the transformation of Thai society through historical analysis, and focuses of the forms of change resulting from the economic crisis more than focusing on Taksin's controversial persona, which tends to pester the bulk of analyses on Thai politics in the post-economic crisis era.

The difference between my earlier referrals in this thesis to Thailand's long-term organic crisis of authority, and the post-1997-98 economic crisis social reality, can be interpreted through Gramsci's interpretative criteria of the passive revolution and the war of position. Gramsci's use of the term passive revolution involves two dimensions: revolution/restoration. They are both connected to the function of hegemony, and Gramsci uses them to indicate how in a class system, the hegemonic rulers perform reforms required in a particular situation to firstly, keep the social cohesion of the system intact, and secondly, to keep their control over the subordinate⁴²⁵. The revolution phase indicates to a dynamic situation and the restoration phase refers to a situation where seemingly progressive reforms are performed; however, the hegemonic control still prevails, in these situations more than not, factions of progressive forces are transfused into the hegemonic order through the reforms taken⁴²⁶. In Thailand, as I interpret it from previously mentioned, the situation between 1932-1997 is characterized by this type of a process of a passive revolution, which alternates between the two poles of restoration/revolution, respectively. Ultimately it could be said that the hegemony of the elite networks rule was never challenged seriously until the post-economic 1997-98 crisis, as previously, the masses, or the subaltern were ultimately too weak to challenge the hegemonic power structures permanently.

The war of position, on the other hand, refers to the situation, in which a new configuration of social forces emerges as the result of an organic crisis, as explained in the theory chapter of this thesis. In the war of position situation, the masses are alienated from their old belief

⁴²² Hewison 2005.

⁴²³ Ungpakorn 2010.

⁴²⁴ Ferrara 2010.

⁴²⁵ Gramsci 2007, 107-119.

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*

systems. The driving for the emergence of the masses as an organized, unified active political force is their risen political consciousness of their position, and their conscious will to challenge the hegemonic forces' rule in favour of bringing forth-alternative ways to organize a society⁴²⁷. Let it mentioned here once again that the abstract concept "war of position", the subaltern challenging the rulers, involves the idea of unlimited potential for development, and it is first and foremost a criterion of interpretation⁴²⁸. Consequently, at the back of my proposal of a new paradigm emerging from the 1997-98 economic crises is a transition in the positional sense from the passive revolution process of the hegemony of the elites, into a positional phase of the war of position of various social configurations in Thai society. In other words, this is an interregnum stage where the old order is dying, and the new is still waiting to be born, as Gramsci⁴²⁹ sums it up.

To back my proposal further, I also propose like Hewison and Ungpakorn earlier, that it is against this major revolution in the economic and the social structures that happened between the years 1997-2014 that the significance of Taksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai Party politics ultimately have to be evaluated.

The rise of the Thai Rak Thai Party and its leader, Taksin Shinawatra to the forefront of Thai politics was initially motored by the anti-globalist sentiment and the dissatisfaction directed at Chuan Leekpai Democrat Party government's implementing of the IMF bailout package in the national economy⁴³⁰. Again, when seen from the "post-1997-98 new phase" perspective, Thai Rak Thai's detailed political party agenda entailed three important election promises to the urban and the rural poor: 1. Establishing the first ever universal health care system in Thailand; 2. simulating local small-scale economy (each village would get a one-million THB loan for the purpose) and 3. Introduction of a debt moratorium for poor farmers⁴³¹. This inclusion of the poor in the agenda of a political party was revolutionary in Thai politics, and Thai Rak Thai Party won two consecutive elections by a landslide in 2001 and 2005, guaranteeing Taksin Shinawatra two periods as a Prime Minister⁴³².

When we look at the contents of the Thai Rak Thai economic policies during the post-economic crisis years of 2001-2006, the economic policies implemented between 2001-2006 were a combination of mild Keynesian economic policies and neomercantilism - state support

⁴²⁷ Gramsci 2007, 210-211.

⁴²⁸ *ibid.*, 114.

⁴²⁹ *ibid.*, 276.

⁴³⁰ Glassman 2004.

⁴³¹ Ungpakorn 2010, 164.

⁴³² Ferrara 2010, 40.

for entrepreneurialism and export competitiveness⁴³³. Called a “dual track” policy by many researchers, this Thai Rak Thai Party agenda initially was to stimulate the domestic economy to counterbalance the trends in world capitalism⁴³⁴.

The implications of the Thai Rak Thai Party election wins within the power structures of Thai society were manifold. The first Thai Rak Thai government was the first Thai government of local tycoons; however, the inclusion of the poor into a new social contract was essential for the government to promote and stimulate domestic business⁴³⁵. Thus, a curious combination of social forces the Thai Rak Thai support base was: the social peace was sealed in the new social contract by a configuration of social forces reaching from various sections of the capitalist class to the urban and the rural poor⁴³⁶.

The new social contract also indicated the need for political reform – the pre-economic crisis new Constitution of 1997 had been created and implemented in a political atmosphere of elation by the progressive factions of society, in which strengthening political participation and democracy were seen as essential components of political decision-making⁴³⁷. Taksin’s government, also partly due to the Thai Rak Thai’s mandate being the result of a parliamentary election, saw the significance of the inclusion of the poor into the new social contract, promoting the democratization of politics, and reallocating resources to the poor as a new prerequisite for being able to promote their new economic policies⁴³⁸. In this sense, I see Taksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party’s significance lies in their democratizing Thai politics. I also propose based on the content of the Taksin era experience from the standpoint of the poor that their notion of democracy means parliamentary democracy and voting in the elections.

11.3. War of position: Thailand’s current political crisis 2006-2014 and the emergence of the Red Shirts movement as a counter-hegemonic force

Since the military coup in 2006, in Gramscian terminology, Thailand has been in a constant organic crisis of authority, which can also be called the crisis of the state –or the crisis of the old hegemonic order. In this crisis, the hegemonic elite networks have tried to use all the

⁴³³ Glassman 2004, 59-61.

⁴³⁴ Chaiwat – Phongpaichit 2008, 264-266.

⁴³⁵ Hewison 2005, 323.

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*, 324.

⁴³⁷ Phognpaichit – Baker 2000, 108.

⁴³⁸ Hewison 2005, 324-325.

opportunities at their perusal, which are inherent in the old system of governance, to reinstate the old cohesive order. Gramsci⁴³⁹ concludes that in the situation of an organic crisis, in which the hegemony of the ruling classes is beginning to break, the open war of position situation of the polarized forces in society concurs. The situation is volatile and dangerous, since the various configurations of social classes are not capable of orienting themselves swiftly to the rhythm of the situation, which Gramsci characterizes as almost lightning-like, as compared to a situation of calm⁴⁴⁰. In this situation, one cannot emphasize enough the bureaucratic-military element in a particular country where the military-bureaucratic social stratum is an important element in the political sphere⁴⁴¹. This has become obvious in the case Thailand through the historical analysis of the function of hegemony in previous chapters in my thesis.

According to Gramsci⁴⁴², the bureaucratic-military axis in society where its position is strong, the power of this stratum to assist in the upkeep of the old hegemonic social order is within its social function – in protecting the hegemonic elite networks ‘interests- and in influencing the psychological tendencies, which their social function favours. This stratum has no economical function in the production as such⁴⁴³. As this non-homogeneous parasitic class formation has no basic role in the actual economic production, their only function is to oppose the subaltern from improving their position⁴⁴⁴. Due to this, their unified resistance to the oppositional force’s attempts to improve their situation involves strong multiplicity of even bizarre ideologies to keep control of the old hegemonic order⁴⁴⁵. The war of position thus happens, as said before, on the politico-ideological level.

Against the above, the military coup of 2006, in the masses’ experience, the military coup of 2006 represents a step back in the progressive democratic development of society. The military coup and the ensuing yellow shirt People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) street demonstrations in 2006 and the occupation of the Bangkok International airport by the PAD in 2008, in this perspective, were a manifestation of the attempt of the old hegemonic networks to narrow the democratic space of society and to show off their support to the old regime⁴⁴⁶. These royalist conservatives resort to old ideologies that have their roots in the past, and that bear no relevance to the present reality of Thai politics in the eyes of the

⁴³⁹ Gramsci 2007, 210-214.

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 210-212.

⁴⁴¹ *ibid.*, 212.

⁴⁴² *ibid.*, 213.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Ungpakorn 2010, 36-39.

empowered civil society⁴⁴⁷. These anti-Taksin ultra-royalists who demanded for the military to step in 2006, and who demanded to return to the ultra-nationalist policies consisted of a cross-class alliance consisting of academics, politicians, middle-class sections, aristocrats, businessmen, media, Buddhist monks, military leaders, Privy Council members and NGOs⁴⁴⁸. The cross-class alliances who have been protesting in Bangkok since November 2013, is in this light only the new configuration of the old ultra-conservative alliance that brought about the military coup in 2006⁴⁴⁹. The current protesters' rhetoric is in essence similar to the rhetoric of the PAD, the main message being getting rid of the Shinawat family, first and foremost⁴⁵⁰.

Moreover, if we go back to Gramsci here and his notion of the old establishment transforming itself into new cross-class formations to keep their hegemonic position, the social forces behind the conservative royalist movement of 2005 and the street protest movement in Bangkok in 2013 are partly the same forces in both movements. What is ironic, is that the recent anti-Taksin People's Democratic Committee (PDRC) street protests in Bangkok who have demanded Taksin Shinawat's sister Yingluck Shinawat to resign, for instance, were initially mobilized by the Democratic Party, whose leader, Abhisit Vejjajiva, was the Prime Minister in 2010, when the Democratic Party government gave the army the permission to use violence against the Red Shirt street protesters⁴⁵¹. The protest leader, Suthep Thuegsuban, was in charge of the Bangkok security in 2010 and signed the ultimate order for the military crackdown of the protest in 2010⁴⁵².

In the subaltern's experience, the step back to the military rule and to the old rhetoric was a reminder to the masses of the violent political massacres of the 1970s by the military. It also brought on the surface the old social divisions of the 1970s, a tumultuous time in Thai politics⁴⁵³. Winichakul⁴⁵⁴ describes the period between the years 1973-76 as the first true democratic period in Thai history. A student uprising in 1973 caused an overthrow of a military junta, and the ensuing three years were a period of true radical reforms; however, this period ended in another violent military coup in 1976 and in a massacre of students in the Thammasat University campus by the military.

⁴⁴⁷ Ferrara 2010, 150-152.

⁴⁴⁸ Kharabi 2010, 24.

⁴⁴⁹ Ungpakorn 2014, 8.

⁴⁵⁰ McCargo 2014. The Guardian 24/01/2014.

⁴⁵¹ Ungpakorn 2014.

⁴⁵² Human Rights Watch News release 17/05/2013.

⁴⁵³ Krittian 2011, 210.

⁴⁵⁴ Winichakul 2008, 17.

The experienced injustice of the military coup of the 2006 and the return of the conservative royalist elites in the form of the yellow shirts, as opposed to the previous five years of the Thai Rak Thai Party rule, is the locus where the emergence of the Red Shirts as a social movement begins. The alienation of the masses from the old ideologies, which have ultimately upheld the cohesion of the old order, has reached a point where the measures that the old establishment are willing to take to preserve the old order, are not compatible with the alternative visions and possibilities that the empowered factions of the civil society demand to be taken. The empowered civil society want to create an alternative way to organize society, which is more democratic and just than the old hegemonic order of the elite networks.

Hence, the measures taken by the alliance of the ultra-royalists and the military to preserve the order and the political reforms presented to the empowered civil society have not been accepted by the empowered civil society as relevant. These measures to revert to the old hegemonic regime rule include the new military Constitution of 2007, approved via referendum, and the military junta's ignoring the pro-Taksin parties winning of the Parliamentary elections of 2007 and the Senate election in 2008 – the pro-junta Democratic Party under the leadership of Abhisit Vejjajiva formed a government in 2008 without an electoral mandate⁴⁵⁵.

The Red Shirt movement, later organized under the umbrella organization called UDD (United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship), began to emerge after the 2007 elections⁴⁵⁶. In my opinion, in the Gramscian sense, the emergence of this movement as an active, spontaneous grass-root movement signals the ultimate shift of various social configurations to the war of position phase of an organic crisis. The Red Shirt movement emerged as mass meetings of ordinary people around Bangkok and later on in the Northeast and in the North; however, the first mass demonstration the UDD organised was only in 2009⁴⁵⁷. The first mass street protests of the UDD in Bangkok in April 2009 ended with the military shooting at the UDD protesters, adding to the insult of the experienced injustice by the empowered civil society, brought on by the military coup⁴⁵⁸.

The street protest of the Red Shirts movement in Bangkok in April-May 2010, in which the Red Shirts occupied the central Bangkok for two months, were, as I see it, worrying from the old conservative networks point of view. I see the Red Shirt movement's protest as a warning

⁴⁵⁵ Thabchumpon & McCargo 2011, 994.

⁴⁵⁶ Ungpakorn 2010, 18.

⁴⁵⁷ Thabchumpon & McCargo 2010, 995.

⁴⁵⁸ Ferrara 2010, 148-149.

sign to the old hegemonic elite networks of how powerful the Red Shirt movement had turned into. The Red Shirt movement had a political platform in these street demonstrations: they demanded the inclusion of the rural and the urban poor in the decision-making, the dissolution of Parliament and new elections; social and political reforms and social justice in the sense that they purported citizen's equality before the law⁴⁵⁹. Fragmented as their political platform was, it showed the old hegemonic elite networks that the Red Shirt movement was not to be ignored any more. The hegemonic rulers retorted to their old strategy and moved from ideological struggle into a direct military involvement: the street protests ended in the military crackdown in May 2010⁴⁶⁰. No military personnel involved in the crackdown were indicted in courts for the violence⁴⁶¹.

What followed, is as I see it, and is another old establishment transformation to keep their control. Parliamentary elections were organised in July 2011⁴⁶². A part of the Red Shirt movement grouped themselves behind a pro-Taksin new political party Pheu Thai, who won the elections, and Taksin Shinawat's sister Yingluck Shinawat became the Prime Minister⁴⁶³. The Thai election of 2011, in the Gramscian sense, is one manifestation of the old establishment's ability to give concessions without losing their hegemonic grip, as the Pheu Thai Party was an alliance of old maverick career politicians and Red Shirt Movement members. Moreover, in order to take part in the elections, a behind-the-scenes deal was allegedly made between the Pheu Thai Party and the old elite networks, including the army that arranging the election and letting the Pheu Thai Party win (which all sides knew would happen) would prevent further escalation of the political crisis and further bloodshed⁴⁶⁴. Moreover, the alleged deal involved the possibility of Taksin Shinawat returning to Thailand in the future⁴⁶⁵. The deal was of mutual benefit for all the political stakeholders in the crisis: the Red Shirts would be appeased, the army's image would improve – and the hegemonic elite networks would still retain their power behind the scenes.

As the events have unfolded since the 2011 elections, the alleged deal de facto has become a self-fulfilling prophesy, when we look at the political developments in Thailand between the years 2011-2014. Some researcher say that the Red Shirt movement has somewhat been disappointed at the non-existent political reforms that the Pheua Thai government has put into

⁴⁵⁹ Ungpakorn 2011, 1-3.

⁴⁶⁰ Horn 2013. Aljazeera 16/12/2013.

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁶² Szepp – Parry 2011. Reuters 03/07/2011.

⁴⁶³ The Guardian 05/08/2013.

⁴⁶⁴ Crispin 2011. Asia Times Online 30/06/2011. Also see Ungpakorn 2012.

⁴⁶⁵ Crispin 2011.

practice, and the disappointment shows in the Red Shirts distancing themselves from the Pheu Thai Party government and the UDD⁴⁶⁶. Pheu Thai amnesty bill of November 2013, in which an umbrella amnesty was granted to the political leaders who were involved in the military crackdown of the street protests in 2010, was the decisive factor in alienating the Red Shirts from the governing party. The royalist conservative elite networks did not accept the clause in the amnesty bill, in which the ex-Prime Minister Taksin Shinawat would be granted an amnesty for all his alleged corruption charges in Thai courts⁴⁶⁷. This “deal gone wrong” launched the latest political crisis with the PDRC organizing street demonstrations and demanding “getting rid of the Taksin Shinawat corruption regime before any elections are acceptable,” which is at the centre of the PDRC’s political program⁴⁶⁸.

When we look at the war of position situation at the current phase of Thailand’s political crisis, we have to mirror it against the normative demands for the alternative organisation of society as proposed by the Red Shirt movement. On the other hand, at the same, we have to compare this proposed alternative organisation of Thai society against the efforts of the old hegemonic regime to sustain their control in the realm of the ideological-political sphere. This is in line with the Gramscian understanding of the organic crisis and the war of position situation, using again the philosophy of praxis as an analytical tool. Gramsci⁴⁶⁹ proposes that an organic crisis is an opportunity, which produces modes of thinking, posing and resolving questions, which comprise of the whole post-crisis development of a national life⁴⁷⁰. Any analysis of a rupture of hegemonic historic bloc needs to be put into a practical context to serve a practical activity⁴⁷¹. The purpose of this is to prepare the counter-hegemonic social forces to gain more empowerment that will act as a unified, compact, self-aware force when a favourable situation is deemed right to ultimately challenge the prevailing hegemonic order⁴⁷². The counter-hegemonic struggle is a long one, as in the war of the position situation the state authority is at the breaking point, and the state will use all illegal means at its disposal while it still appears to remain within legality⁴⁷³.

⁴⁶⁶ Ungpakorn 2012, 13. Ungpakorn proposes a rift between the grass-root Red Shirt Movement, the UDD leaders and the Pheu Thai Party; however, at the time of writing this thesis, the 2014 elected new UDD leaders are more radical than the 2012 leadership and popular among the grassroots Red Shirts. Heli Kontio.

⁴⁶⁷ Bagenal 2013. The Christian Science Monitor 12/11/2013.

⁴⁶⁸ Walker 2013. Australian National University Website News 05/12/2013.

⁴⁶⁹ Gramsci 2007, 185.

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*, 185.

⁴⁷² Gramsci 2007, 185.

⁴⁷³ *ibid.*, 232.

Hence, Ungpakorn⁴⁷⁴ sums up these normative questions as follows: free and fair elections, basic equal standards of justice, integrity of public institutions, strength of pro-democratic social movements and citizen participation. In the light of how the organic crisis of the Thai state has led into the polarization of the two political opposites in the realm of Thai politics, the conclusion of Thailand's current political crisis would be, that the democratic space for the empowered civil society has narrowed considerably during these years from the situation in the 1990s⁴⁷⁵. The old hegemonic regime of elite networks has come up with new ways to keep their control in this war of position situation and transformed their *modus operandi* into a more authoritarian direction, with the ex-PM Taksin playing both sides of the conflict behind the scenes in the centre of the conflict - he is a part of the conservative elites and a royalist and him and the Pheu Thai government do not want to "rock the boat"; however, he and Yingluck Shinawat's Pheu Thai government want to modernize Thailand and include the poor in the decision-making processes, too⁴⁷⁶

As for the free and fair elections, in February, the parliamentary elections were organized; however, the politicized Constitutional Court of Thailand deemed them void⁴⁷⁷. The Constitutional Courts based their decision on the fact that the election could not be organized at every election site in the kingdom on the same day⁴⁷⁸. As for the basic standards of justice for all citizens, there are no equal standards of justice in Thailand. An example of this is the increased misuse of the *Lèse Majesté* legislation to suppress political opposition⁴⁷⁹. There are also double standards in the use of law when it comes to an ordinary citizen getting a just court case: an example of this are the thousands of jailed political prisoners, whose existence neither Thailand's government nor the international human rights organisations like the Amnesty International acknowledge⁴⁸⁰. There is no integrity of the public institutions, an example of which is the politicized administrative courts, rearranged to serve the hegemonic regime in the Constitution created by the military junta in 2007⁴⁸¹. The participation of the pro-democratic social movements and citizen participation are both extremely limited at the current phase of the crisis. This includes also the labour union movement and labour rights; in Thailand, the labour rights are very limited, and the state repression of the free labour union

⁴⁷⁴ Ungpakorn 2014, 1. Ungpakorn presents a list of nine points and evaluates each of them in his pamphlet. In my own research, I only mention the questions that have come up in the Red Shirts basic demands between 2006-2014.

⁴⁷⁵ Hewison – Kitirianglarp 2010, 195-198.

⁴⁷⁶ Personal conversation with Ungpakorn 03/05/2014.

⁴⁷⁷ Amatatham 2014. The New York Times 21/03/2014.

⁴⁷⁸ *ibid.* In earlier elections, this "problem" has been solved via by-elections. Heli Kontio.

⁴⁷⁹ Ungpakorn 2011; Streckfuss 2010, 105-108.

⁴⁸⁰ Streckfuss 2010, 134-138.

⁴⁸¹ Ungpakorn 2014.

movement has a long tradition⁴⁸². One deterrence for the Red Shirt social movement to act freely, for instance, is the constant threat of state violence either through the indirect violence – the misuse of the public courts by the hegemonic regime or through direct violence⁴⁸³. The ever-present fear of the military coup and the army's use of violence regulate the actions of the pro-democratic movement⁴⁸⁴. Another deterrent fear factor is the political extrajudicial assassinations of political activists⁴⁸⁵.

As a conclusion, according to Gramsci⁴⁸⁶, the solution for the subaltern, the masses to win the class struggle of the war of position lies in constant awareness, analysis, preparation, and organisation. How the current historical Thai political crisis will unfold, depends firstly, on the strength of the inbuilt logic of the current hegemonic historic bloc. As the creating of the hegemony of the elite networks in Thai society has been a long temporal process, the system's structures may uphold the system for a long time: the strong position of the military and the bureaucracy, and the upcoming succession to the throne question all refer to this direction. The counter-hegemonic resistance movement's possibilities to challenge the hegemonic historic bloc's rule, all things considered, on the other hand, depends firstly, a lot on the possibilities of the emergence of a favourable conjunctural process, which might emerge or might not emerge. Secondly, and which emphasizes the agency of the counter-hegemonic force, the counter-hegemonic movement may put their risen political awareness into action without waiting for a favourable conjunctural moment.

12. CONCLUSIONS

My initial research question was that since Thailand's economic crisis in 1997-98, there is a total new phase, a new paradigm, emerging in Thai politics. I proposed that this new phase involves a major organic crisis. This crisis is the crisis of the monolithic Thai state, a crisis of authority, which involves firstly, the crumbling of the hegemonic regime of the old elite networks. Secondly, it involves the emergence of the masses as a unified counterhegemonic

⁴⁸² Ungpakorn 2010, 79-81. Yimprasert 2013, 59-61.

⁴⁸³ Ungpakorn 2012, 9-10.

⁴⁸⁴ Amsterdam 2014. Robert Amsterdam Thailand News 11/01/2014; Personal conversation with Robert Amsterdam 05/11/2013.

⁴⁸⁵ See for instance Human Rights Watch News Release 23/04/2014 regarding the assassination of poet and activist Mai Nueng Kor Kunthee (Kamol Duangphasuk).

⁴⁸⁶ Gramsci 2007, see for example pp. 348-351.

force, which is challenging the old hegemonic order and demands alternative ways of organizing society with their demands on social justice, social reforms, and more democracy. This counterhegemonic force today is unified under the umbrella organisation of the UDD and in the Red Shirt Movement. The situation, expressed in Gramscian perspective, is a situation of the war of position between various social forces.

I see the current Thai historical political crisis as a class conflict, the roots of which go back to the long-term development of Thailand as a modern capitalist state. Therefore, instead of studying the current crisis as an isolated political crisis, I saw it necessary to study the underlying dynamics between all the political stakeholders in the crisis, to get a whole picture of the factors affecting the power relationships between the political stakeholders in the current crisis. The reason for this proposal is to shift the focus from the superficial twists and turns of Thai politics, into the factors that shape and have shaped the conflict, when put into a historical context where they emerge from. To understand the depth of the current class conflict, one has to focus on the totality of the power relations in Thai society and their changes, against the changes in the structures of the international system.

Hence, for example, going back to my research question regarding the new phase of Thai politics emerging after Thailand's economic crisis, analysing just that particular crisis leaves the analysis incomplete, as the roots of the social conflict go further back further than just to this particular economic conflict. Subsequently, even though the 1997-98 economic crisis and its socio-political implications that ensued were fundamental when it comes to the restructuring of the economic base of society, and the emergence of the masses as a counterhegemonic, unified force, these changes still do not explain, for instance, the Thai military's strong position in the current Thai political crisis. Neither do the 1997-98 economic crisis and its implications explain the deep social divisions in Thai society, nor the roots of these social divisions. The hegemonic structures of the current order were created much earlier, and those structures still affect the current crisis. Therefore, in Thailand's case, an analysis on the current crisis only is complete when the researcher deconstructs the process of this long-term development.

Therefore, in order to reconstruct the dynamics of the totality of the power relations of the political stakeholders in Thai society and the forms of change in these relations, I opted to use the Gramscian perspective and his philosophy of praxis as my tool of analysis in my thesis.

In my thesis, I have tried to show the possibilities of the Gramscian analysis in studying political crises, with Thailand's current historical politics as my case example. I have done this by combining the Italian school's international systemic approach and reconstructing Gramsci's thought by reading Gramsci's original texts, combined with my accumulated local contextual knowledge of the underlying dynamics of the current historical Thai political crisis. I chose the Gramscian approach of the philosophy of praxis because it has to some extent been neglected as an approach to identify and articulate social change and transformation. I propose this because the relative autonomy of the local level and the change on the local level is missing in political analyses relying on the Italian School approach. Roccu mentions the Middle East social change and transformation as an example of this under exploitation of the Gramscian approach in the field of International Relations, and the neglect of the autonomy of the local level in the analyses. This neglect is also evident in the bulk of academic research in Southeast Asian politics and in the context of my own research, which is Thai politics. Based on my research process, I propose that the Gramscian philosophy of praxis is a fruitful analytical tool in studying the effects of the structural changes on a regional and on a local level, too, and why the implications of these international- regional effects influence the domestic level of a particular society on a political level.

There are three factors involved in my approach that led my research process: the Marxist understanding of the articulation of the relationship between the material base of society and the superstructure evolving from it- it is the relationship between the economic and the political. The second dimension is the relationship between the international level and the domestic level; and how these two levels interact with each other. The third dimension is the relationship between the material and the ideational in a particular society.

These three dimensions form the core of my analysis, at the centre of which is the focus is on the totality of power relations in society and how these relations change.

In Gramscian analysis, the economic organisation of society defines the form of these power relations embedded in society. Thus, the researcher's first task in applying the Gramscian method is to identify and articulate *the relationship between the material base and the superstructure level, and how the form of organisation on the base structure level affects the organisation of the political and the ideological, it is: the superstructure level*. Central to the Gramscian approach is *the function of hegemony*, which evolves from the way the economic relations in a particular society are organised. In Gramscian analysis, the social forces that have hegemony over the means of production will have hegemony over the superstructure

level in society in a class society. By this, Gramsci refers to the form of the ideological-political rule, a hegemonic regime.

Hegemony is a process based not only on coercion on the rulers' part, but it is also a process, which is based on consent on the part of the ruled to accept a status quo in society. The hegemonic rule of the leading groups in a society is kept in place through *passive revolution*, which means that the rulers alter between the poles of restoration/revolution to implement the necessary reforms in the process of transformation in a society. A hegemonic structure is a *historical* structure, which emerges in a particular historical context and which will prevail until the conditions develop for a counterhegemonic social force to emerge as a collective force to challenge the prevailing hegemonic regime, and to present new ways of organising a society. The emergence of a counterhegemonic force as an active political agent assigns the emergence of what Gramsci call a war of position of social forces, which is a historical interregnum situation, in which the old hegemonic order is crumbling, and a new social order is awaiting to be born.

Gramscian approach studies the function of hegemony through the method of the *philosophy of praxis*. Embedded in the philosophy of praxis method is the notion that *theory and practice are inseparable* from each other: first, a human being becomes aware of the hegemonic social relations and his position in the hegemonic structures. Once he/she has attained awareness of the inequalities of the current system, he/she will put his/her knowledge into practice and tries to change the hegemonic system, together with other people belong to his/her social class. Philosophy of praxis thus also entails the emancipatory notion of knowledge: we study society in order to break free of all forms of dominance. Essential to the method of the philosophy of praxis is a *notion of history as dialectical process*. History is understood both as *a necessity and as a conjuncture*. The notion Gramsci proposes can be identified through analysing *crises: an organic crisis* is a crisis that has long-term implications on the economic and historical structure of a particular society. It refers to the major structural changes on the base structure level, which are reflected on the level of superstructure of a particular society. A conjunctural crisis is a passing, a temporary one, which disappears when the problem at the centre of the crisis disappears. Using the method of the philosophy of praxis thus requires differentiating between the two, through the use of a strict historical analysis of the totality of the power relations in a society. Only then is the researcher able to identify and articulate the major ruptural changes in his/her analysis.

In Gramscian analysis, the analysis happens on two levels simultaneously: firstly on the *domestic level*, and secondly, on the *international systemic level*, as both levels affect each other reciprocally. The hegemonic processes on the domestic level reflect the structural changes on the international level, respectively. The researcher has to shift her/his focus between these two levels intermittently.

As Thailand's current political crisis has its roots in the long-term capitalist development in Thailand, not only in the economic structural changes brought on by adjusting Thai economy to the Neoliberalist offensive implemented with the assistance of the international Neoliberalist institutional structures after the crisis of 1997-98, I had to look further in the history of Thailand's development processes as a modern capitalist society, and try to articulate where the roots of the unequal development within the country initially stem from.

Throughout the thesis process, the three factors mentioned in the beginning of this chapter led my research: the relationship between the base economic organisation of society and its effects on the superstructure level, the economic base, and the political level; the relationship between the domestic level and the international level, and the relationship between the material and the ideational.

Here, the application of the Italian School's world system analysis proves helpful in articulating the backdrop against which the forms of change on the local level of Thai society could be reflected upon, as the changes on the local level reflected the forms of change on the international systemic level. Hence, through studying the function of hegemony through historical analysis, I ended up using the Neo-Gramscian Italian School's approach to articulate the forms of change; to identify the framework against which the change processes took place in the particular context of Thai society. Hence, I used the Italian School's grouping of the three major historical structures, historic blocs in the international system, as a backdrop, as a theoretical framework for my own analysis. Those three historic blocs I grouped as Pax Britannica, Pax Americana, and Oligopolistic Neoliberalism. All these historic blocs influenced the forms of change and transformation of society on the domestic level of Thai society.

Consequently, if we unravel the function of hegemony in Thai society, the actual creating of the hegemonic elite network rule inside Siam happened in the Pax Britannica era. Thus, we can position in a particular historical context, for instance, the strong position of the army in Thai politics. The establishing of the military as an important class to protect the national

elites' interests can hence be traced all the way to the era of the implementing of the modern capitalist system in Siam and the creation of the nation-state in the country at the end of the 19th century. The strong position of the bureaucracy class can be traced to the same era. The economic changes in Siam followed the economic changes in the international system and were submitted to the Western colonial expansion; however, the form that the changes took on the local level is a different process altogether, autonomous of the international level.

The establishing of the military and the bureaucracy as a strong class to protect the national elites' interests were due to the need of consolidating the Bangkok administration's power within the provinces, in the periphery of Siam, which at time was not under the administrative control of Bangkok. Both classes have retained their power as parts of the ruling elite networks up until the current crisis, and no restructuring of the economic organisation of Thai society has weakened these two classes' position in Thai society. The local revolution of 1932, in which absolute monarchy was abolished, served mainly to strengthen the military's position in society, as the coup-makers themselves were part of the elite networks. The military has retained their strong position up until now, the only change being that in the 1980s and in the 1990s, the military withdrew in the background in Thai politics, to emerge in the forefront again in the 2000s. The establishment of the national capitalist class also has its root in this era, when the old elite families established their economic power.

The Pax Americana era consolidated the hegemonic elite rule. The forms of change in the totality of the power structure in Thai society in the Pax Americana era involved the implementing of the industrial capitalism in Thailand, which brought forward the rise of the Chinese family businesses as a part of the elite network rule. During the Pax Americana era, the influence of the international dimension of hegemony was strong, as the US was practically a patron state of Thailand. Thailand's function in the US policy in Southeast Asia was twofold: to serve the Japanese economy that was of strategic value to the American interests in the region, and to act as a base for the expansion of the American capitalism in the region, masked under the ideological pretence of containing communism. In this era, the industrialisation of Thailand was carried out under the developmental paradigm, which involved the military-technocrat governments creating the framework for major economic projects with American aid, and the local Chinese-Thai business families executing the projects.

An important part of the consolidation of the hegemony of the elite network rule in Thailand during this era has to do with the material-ideational axis: this is the era when the reinstating

of Thai monarchy as an ideological construct emerges from. The usefulness of Thai monarchy as a tool of the hegemonic elite networks to unify Thailand began at the end of the 1950s, and this tool has preserved its value in the hands of the elite networks up until the current Thai political crisis. The position of the monarchy as a political tool of the elite networks has become even more obvious in the current crisis, during which the trump card of the use of the harsh *Lèse Majesté* jurisdiction is used increasingly to silence opposition. Since 2006, the *Lèse Majesté* cases have multiplied, and there is no end in sight to the misuse of this particular law.

Seen in this perspective, Thailand's economic crisis in 1997-98 against the backdrop of the historic bloc of oligopolistic neoliberalism and the ensuing international neo-liberalist offensive on Thailand's economy and the socio-political implications of this offensive, which includes the emergence of the Thai Rak Thai Party and their leader Taksin Shinawat, marks firstly, the total restructuring of Thailand's economic base, and the restructuring of the domestic capital. Secondly, and what is more important in the context of this study, it marks the emergence of the masses as active political force, whose participation in political decision-making in the matters that concern them was acknowledged for the first time in Thai history by a political party through implementing pro-poor policies. Herein lays the significance of the "Taksin" era: the Thai Rak Thai Party "democratized" Thai politics with their pro-poor policies. What is important from the perspective of the rural and the urban poor was my proposed notion that in their experience and in their political consciousness the notion of "democracy" means electoral democracy – their voice is heard, and they can influence political decision-making through voting. This notion is important in light of the emergence of the Red Shirt Movement after the 2006 military coup: one of the demands of the Red Shirt Movement has been "democracy" all along the era of their existence. At the back of this thought, I claim is their experience of the Thai Rak Thai Party era and the mandate the poor gave to it through voting for their representatives.

The previously mentioned in its totality indicates to the answer to my initial research question of the emergence of the new paradigm or phase in Thai politics since Thailand's economic crisis in 1997-98. The crisis and the ensued Taksin era in my opinion is the beginning of the breakdown of the Thai elite networks' hegemonic rule on the superstructure level of Thai society. What began as an economic crisis, set in motion a process on the politico-ideological level, an organic crisis, which in the Gramscian sense indicates a shift in the totality of the power relations in a society, and the beginning of the breakdown of an old hegemonic regime

rule. The organic crisis causes the shift from the passive revolution of the old hegemonic regime into the war of position situation between the rulers and the ruled. In the passive revolution situation, the society's adjustment to the new historical economic situation is carried out from above, by the hegemonic regime: the necessary socio-political reforms brought on by this economic crisis are performed by the hegemonic rulers. This is not possible in the new war of position situation any more, in which an equilibrium exists between the rulers, and the ruled, as neither force is stronger than the other. The poor have alienated themselves from the old ideologies, and their political consciousness has risen. Due to this, the masses do not want to give their consent to the old hegemonic regime any more. In this war of position situation the poor, the masses, are not a passive mass any more, but a politically aware, politically active counterhegemonic force, who through their demands of social justice and reform demand an alternative way to organize a society. This is exactly what Thailand's current political crisis is all about, and embedded therein is the answer to my research question: the new phase or the new paradigm in Thai politics indicates the beginning of the breakdown of the hegemony of the Thai elite networks in Thai politics, in the superstructure level of Thai society. As the war of position situation in the Gramscian sense is an interregnum period, in which the Hence, I see that the Gramscian historical analysis and the use of the philosophy of praxis as a method answers my initial research question.

At the time I am writing my thesis, there is no solution to Thailand's political crisis in sight. The speculations include the Yellow Shirts Royalist PDCR's demands for an appointed government, the possibility of the civil war, another military coup. In Gramscian perspective, an old historic bloc will not cede from being until the hegemonic forces that keep its cohesion together have used up all the transformation possibilities that the inbuilt logic of the old historic bloc entails to preserve the old order. As I see it, in Thailand, these transformation processes of the hegemonic elite networks rule are still not over. These possibilities to preserve the old hegemonic rule are many, as we have seen recently in the politicized use of the law by various judicial administrative institutions to interfere in the political processes. On the other hand, the political polarization of Thai society into two camps and the efforts of the hegemonic elite networks to suppress the Red Shirt Movement may cause the ever-underlying political violence to erupt once again. In the end, following Gramsci and his philosophy of praxis I claim that there is no going back, as the rural and the urban poor have awakened and what is more important, they have the will and passion to change the society and offer alternative options on how to organize Thai society so that their demands for social justice, social reforms and democracy will be answered.

As my thesis is a holistic, general study into the power relations in Thai society and a study into the forms of change these relations have taken over time, there are a few questions that come into my mind regarding possible further research on Thai politics from the Gramscian perspective. As the Gramscian perspective is extremely flexible as a method, one possible topic of further research could be my deepening of the Gramscian method in studying special dimensions of Thai politics. In my thesis, my analysis happens on rather a general level, the focus being on the functional dimension of the function of hegemony; it is the legitimization of the rule of the Thai hegemonic elites. In this respect, when it comes to Thai politics and the legitimization of the elite rule, one uncharted territory especially comes to my mind that presents more questions than there exist answers in the field of the academic research on Thai politics: the analysis on Thai monarchy as a part of the hegemonic elite networks rule. The analysis on Thai monarchy is sorely neglected for the reasons mentioned earlier in this thesis.

When one thinks of deepening the Gramscian analysis and the philosophy of praxis as a method, as a tool of analysis, it might be a basis for a further study on Thai politics. This would involve moving away from the functional perspective of the function of hegemony and acquainting myself further in Roccu's articulation approach, which Roccu has outlined in his PhD thesis on the unravelling of the hegemony of the local elites in Egyptian context against the backdrop of the neoliberalist economic framework. The articulation approach deepens the Gramscian analysis as a method by articulating the different dimensions of the function of hegemony in a more detailed way than what I have done in my analysis. The merit of Roccu's analysis is in how through the detailed articulation of the function of hegemony he manages to avoid what he calls the weaknesses of both the Italian and the Amsterdam schools. According to him, the weakness of the Amsterdam school type of an analysis in the field of International Relations is in their use of the functional dimension of the function of hegemony (transnational class approach), which leaves the analysis incomplete in the sense, that the focus of this approach is mainly on the legitimization of the hegemonic rule by a certain class. The weakness of the Italian school, on the other hand, is their focus on the consensual aspect of the function of hegemony. This focus tends to shift the analysis from Gramsci's initial balanced equation between the material and the ideational, more towards the idealistic interpretation, which lessens the value of the analysis. As my thesis partly uses the Italian School's theoretical approach, my own research would benefit from Roccu's more detailed articulation approach, as it avoids the pitfalls of both schools. Hence, the using of the articulation approach more in research as a research method, as I propose, would enrich the Neo-Gramscian research, as it respects the flexibility of the original Gramscian approach, and

its use as a method, as an analytical tool of research. In the case of Thai politics, in particular, this approach would open up new possibilities for research.

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